

“Christ’s Genealogy Trilogy”

Matthew 1:1-17 (part 1)

January 21, 2024

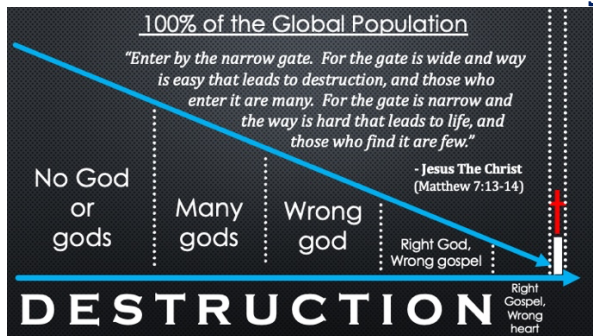
TEXT / VIDEO: *“Matthew 1:1-17”*

INTRO: Welcome to the Gospel of Matthew & his genealogy of Jesus The Christ!

PRAYER

CONTEXT:

- Week 3 in The Gospel of Matthew:
- Gospel = “good news” & Matthew’s is great news!
- So far, we have focused on the big picture...
- Jesus... The Christ... The King... The Blessing...
- Last time: we keyed in on Abraham’s role...



- Today: we will see how David is woven in as well.
- **5 goals:**

- *Exalt The Christ*
- *Elevate The Word of God*
- *Exhort the lost*
- *Equip the Christian*
- *Edify The Church*

BIG IDEA: Christ's genealogy trilogy
is less about the family tree & more about
the forest of faith!

PREVIEW:

1. Christ's GENEALOGY
2. Christ's TRILOGY
3. Christ's DOXOLOGY

I. Christ's GENEALOGY

- A. What is a genealogy?
- B. *It depends on your perspective* & who you ask?
- C. It can be more or less... or a combination & more
- D. Remember, both the devil & the divine
can be found in the details of God's Word

II. Christ's TRILOGY

- A. Matthew's genealogy begins with His TRILOGY...
 - a. **PERSPECTIVE...** God's Word, will, & ways
 - b. **TRINITY...** Father, Son, Holy Spirit
 - c. **PURPOSE...** God's glory, grace, & gospel...
 - d. **STRUCTURE...** per Matthew's Gospel...

Matthew's Gospel GENEALOGY of Jesus Christ

- **Structural design is a key to interpretation...**
 - We don't tell God's Word what it is saying...
 - *We look/listen to it to learn what it is saying!*

Matthew's Gospel GENEALOGY of Jesus Christ

Verse 1		
<u>Verse 2-6a</u>	<u>Verse 6b-11</u>	<u>Verse 12-16</u>
Verse 17		

e. Genealogy THEOLOGY... is coming next time

- B. Christ's trilogy begins with Him as CREATOR
 - a. John 1:1 (per Genesis 1:1 & Matthew 1:1)
 - b. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (cf. 2 Peter 1:20)
- C. EVERYTHING in creation is about & for Him!
 - a. John 1:1-18
 - b. Colossians 3:17 & 2 Corinthians 10:31
- D. Today we'll parallel two huge examples from amongst countless others in the Bible...
 - a. Christ's genealogy here in Matthew's Gospel
 - b. **The Old Testament Feasts/Festivals...**

*The thing that God wants us to see, believe,
& celebrate is that Jesus Christ is both
LORD and SAVIOR!*

VIDEO: "Leviticus Festivals 1"

- E. Notice the order & structure of the Festivals and how they demonstrate God's intentionality...

*Don't miss **the BOTH/AND beauty, genius, & tension** that God often uses*

- F. In the same way that the LORD uses "ordinary people" to produce extra-ordinary results...

- G. So, He also uses naturally occurring events to demonstrate supernatural realities.
- a. Scheduled festivals...
 - b. Genealogical family lines...
 - c. The obvious & not so obvious words of God!
 - i. God's use of **Literary Devices**:
 - 1. Different Genres...
 - 2. Types/Shadows (ie. The Ark)
 - 3. Parables, Hyperbole, etc.
 - 4. Parallelisms: Couplets; **Chiasms**...
 - 5. **Remez** (cf. Psalm 22)
 - 6. Acrostics (cf. Psalm 119)
 - ii. Today's new tool... Hebrew Gematria

God often places the amazing... in the midst of what is wrongly thought to be mundane! – JDP

III. *Christ's* **DOXOLOGY**

VIDEO: *"Leviticus Festivals 2"*

AMAZING right?!?

Get ready... ***Here comes more avalanche of evidence!***

The genealogy of Jesus Christ is no more a mere list of family names than the O.T. Festivals are a simple list of cultural celebrations!

Matthew's Gospel GENEALOGY of Jesus Christ

Verse 1

Verse 2-6a

Verse 6b-11

Verse 12-16

(14 GENERATIONS)

(14 GENERATIONS)

(14 GENERATIONS)

Verse 17

Matthew's Gospel GENEALOGY of Jesus Christ

Verse 1

Verse 2-6a

Verse 6b-11

Verse 12-16

Abraham
to
King David

(14 GENERATIONS)

King David
to
Babylon

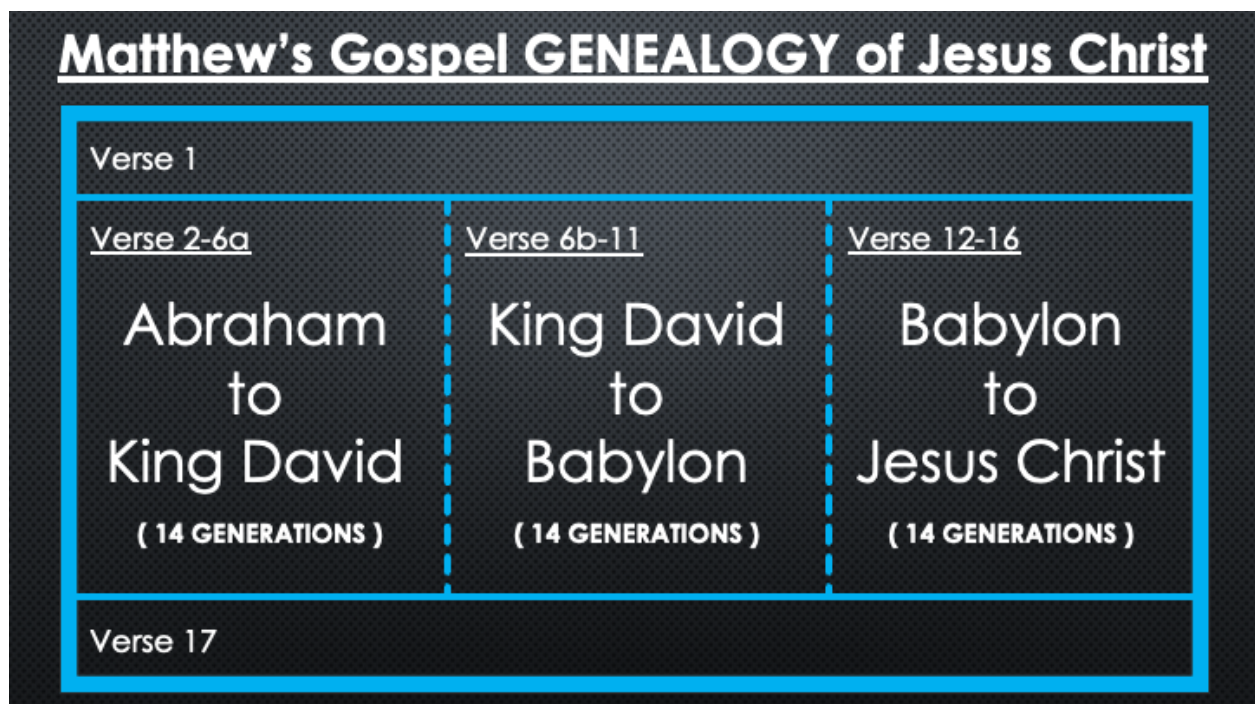
(14 GENERATIONS)

Babylon
to
Jesus Christ

(14 GENERATIONS)

Verse 17

- A. Our living & loving Creator God & Crucified King has ALWAYS been about RELATIONSHIPS
- B. We see this in the Trinity, the Garden, & the Cross
- C. See THE “m M m” (miracle, Messiah, mission) in EVERYTHING God reveals in His Word & world!
- D. SEE the power of God’s Word & His PERSPECTIVE
- E. In the same way that there is SO MUCH MORE to the Leviticus Festivals than most people see... so it is with Matthew’s Gospel genealogy trilogy...
- F. See a genealogy trilogy of DIVINE GEMATRIA:



<u>Gospel GEMATRIA</u>		
<u>Abe to David</u>	<u>David to Exile</u>	<u>Exile to Christ</u>
(14 GENERATIONS)	(14 GENERATIONS)	(14 GENERATIONS)

- a. 14 generations per group = David (5x) focus
 - i. **David = 14... D + V + D... 4 + 6 + 4 = 14**
 - ii. **"Son of David" throughout Matthew...**
- b. Matthew changes some name spellings and even some names in his genealogy... (5X in section 1: Abraham to David).
- c. Abraham is last & David is first names on list
- d. **Section 1 list of all the names as Matthew lists them comes to a total sum of 574.**

<u>Gospel GEMATRIA</u>		
<u>Abe to David</u>	<u>David to Exile</u>	<u>Exile to Christ</u>
David = 14		
Abraham = 41		
Sum total of all = 574		
David X Abe = 574		
(14 GENERATIONS)	(14 GENERATIONS)	(14 GENERATIONS)

- e. 574 = DAVID (14) X ABRAHAM (41)
- f. See how SECTION 1 ends on a high note!

See here Matthew's restating of 1:1 and connecting Christ to both Abraham & David

- g. SECTION 2 names are ALL KINGS per 1st Chr.
- h. After Solomon all kings are from Judah only
- i. Matthew leaves out Zedekiah at the end...
- j. **NOTE how** SECTION 2 ends on a low note!
- k. *Maybe David isn't all that...he's not our focus!*
- l. Matthew shifts his source away from 1 Chr. in SECTION 1 to RUTH for SECTION 2... but he ultimately shifts again to 2 Samuel when certain names are needed.

Intentionally using 2 Samuel 11-12 seems to almost disrespect David... as if to ensure that his sin is included in the storyline...

- m. Why?
- n. Because David is not our focus, Lord, or Savior... Jesus is!
- o. **No earthly king or kingdom will ever do!**
- p. **NOTE:** again in SECTION 2, Matthew changes the spelling of some names

NOTE: *The WRONG PERSPECTIVE here will lead some to question the validity of God's Word...*

Gospel GEMATRIA

<u>Abe to David</u>	<u>David to Exile</u>	<u>Exile to Christ</u>
David = 14	David = 14	
Abraham = 41	Jeconiah = 40	
Sum total of all = 574	Sum total of all = 560	
David X Abe = 574	David X Jeco. = 560	
(14 GENERATIONS)	(14 GENERATIONS)	(14 GENERATIONS)

- q. The total sum of the names listed in SECTION 2 is **560**... that is the exact number we get when we **multiply David's # with the last king listed (Jeconiah's) number** ($14 \times 40 = 560$).

QUOTE:

If the genealogy of Abraham to David suggests great possibilities for Israel, the genealogy "from *David* to the deportation to Babylon" affirms that these possibilities were squandered by the monarchy, **beginning with David** himself.

- Middleton

- r. **SECTION 3** starts with 2 known names from 1 Chronicles but then the rest of the names do not come from any known O.T. genealogy

s. **NOTE:** Matthew says there are 14 generations between Babylon & Jesus BUT he only gives 13 names...

i. **CRITICAL CLOSURE:**

1. 3 sections now = $14 + 14 + 13 = 41$
2. Remember... 41 = Abraham's #
3. *Jesus at end now links Him to Abe*

ii. **POWERFUL POSSIBILITY:**

1. What if add "Messiah" as #42?
2. *Messiah GEMATRIA also = 42*
 - a. *Section 3 now = 588*
 - b. *David X Messiah = 14×42*
 - c. David X Messiah = 588
 - d. *Messiah links to David*

<u>Gospel GEMATRIA</u>		
<u>Abe to David</u>	<u>David to Exile</u>	<u>Exile to Christ</u>
David = 14	David = 14	Only 13 names given ($14 + 14 + 13 = 41$)
Abraham = 41	Jeconiah = 40	Abraham = 41
Sum total of all = 574	Sum total of all = 560	#14 "Messiah" = 42
David X Abe = 574	David X Jeco. = 560	New sum total = 588
		David X Messiah = 588
(14 GENERATIONS)	(14 GENERATIONS)	(14 GENERATIONS)

iii. AMAZING AGGREGATE:

<u>Gospel GEMATRIA</u>					
<u>Abe to David</u>		<u>David to Exile</u>		<u>Exile to Christ</u>	
574	+	560	+	588	=
(14 GENERATIONS)		(14 GENERATIONS)		(14 GENERATIONS)	

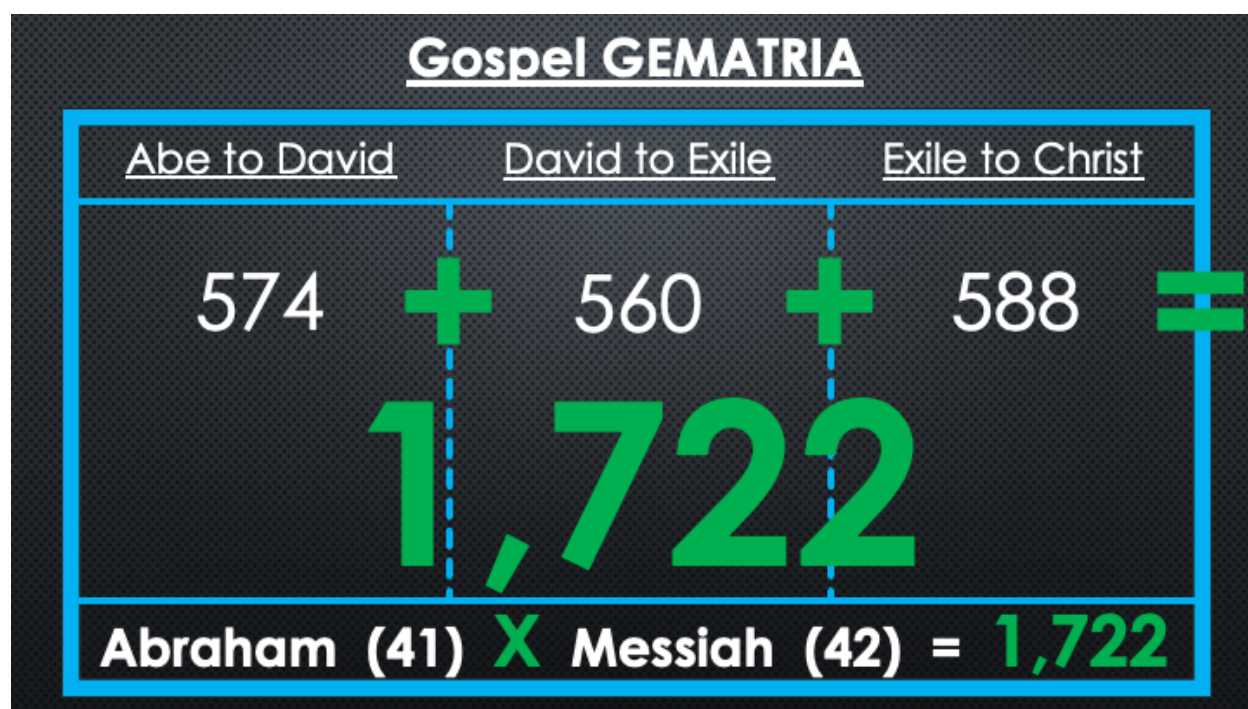
1. Add all 3 sections (w/ Messiah)

2. $574 + 560 + 588 = 1,722$

<u>Gospel GEMATRIA</u>					
<u>Abe to David</u>		<u>David to Exile</u>		<u>Exile to Christ</u>	
574	+	560	+	588	=
(14 GENERATIONS)		(14 GENERATIONS)		(14 GENERATIONS)	

1,722

Look at how we get to **1722...**



REVIEW:

Christ's genealogy trilogy

is less about the family tree & more about
the forest of faith!

I pray that today, together... we:

- *Exalted The Christ*
- *Elevated The Word of God*
- *Exhorted the lost*
- *Equipped the Christian*
- *Edified The Church*

CLOSE:

After all that... let me ask you... **So what?**

- *This is not about Bible trivia...*
- *I didn't just teach you some theological party trick.*
- *Our text is a trilogy of divine truth in love (Eph.4:15).*
- ***Biblical Jesus Christ is CREATOR, KING, & SAVIOR!***
- *So the question for each us becomes...*

Now What?



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It's time for Truth in love!

PRAYER

WORSHIP: *The Way Maker & The Doxology*

Matthew's Genealogy of Jesus: Part I

By

[J. Richard Middleton](#)

on August 11, 2021

In the third part of a four-part series, J. Richard Middleton shares an introduction to Matthew's genealogy, with a close look at Abraham to David. In this third part of his four-part series, J. Richard Middleton shares an introduction to Matthew's genealogy, with a close look at Abraham to David. So far **the genealogies we have examined in the primeval history (Genesis 1-11) are all *descending* genealogies, starting with an important ancient ancestor and ending with a later descendant**, to show continuity of the lineage.

But **there are also *ascending* genealogies in the Bible, which go in the opposite direction. These genealogies begin with a person who will be important (either positively or negatively) in the narrative to come, but take us back in time to some important ancestor, thus establishing the person's heritage.** In the Old Testament, these tend to be short, succinct genealogies, such as the notices about the family lineages of Bezalel ([Exod 31:2](#)), Korah ([Num 16:1](#)), Zelophehad ([Num 27:1](#)), Achan ([Josh 7:1](#)), Hannah's husband, Elkanah ([1 Sam 1:1-2](#)), and Saul's father, Kish ([1 Sam 9:1-2](#)).

An important exception to the length of ascending genealogies is Luke's genealogy of Jesus ([Luke 3:23-38](#)), where he traces Jesus's lineage back seventy-six generations to Adam, "the son of God." This establishes Jesus's identity, **which is the basis for the declaration from God at**

his baptism, which comes *just* before the genealogy, “*You are my Son, my beloved*” (Luke 3:21) and relates to the words of the devil in the temptation narrative, which immediately follows the genealogy, “*If you are the Son of God . . .*” (Luke 4:3, 9).¹⁵

But here I need to leave aside Luke’s genealogy, since there is so much in Matthew’s alone that it will take up all my space in this article and the next.¹⁶

Matthew opens his Gospel with a descending genealogy of a very special type, which has been called a *teleological* genealogy, since it culminates in a final figure in the lineage, one who is the end point or *telos* of the genealogy.¹⁷

There are two teleological genealogies in the Bible: [Ruth 4:18-22](#) (ending with David) and [Matthew 1:1-17](#) (ending with Jesus).

Matthew clearly draws on the genealogy in Ruth, although he also draws on the genealogy that begins [1 Chronicles 1:1-9](#) and to some extent on the Genesis genealogies. He specifically models his Gospel on 1 Chronicles by *beginning* with a genealogy.

Matthew opens his genealogy (and his Gospel) with these words: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” ([Matt 1:1](#)).¹⁸ **From this declaration it is clear that Matthew**

wants to root Jesus firmly in the story of Israel, with a focus on Abraham, the father of the nation, through whom God promised to bless the gentiles, and on David, Israel's second king, whose dynasty ruled Judah until the Babylonian exile.

The exile is explicitly mentioned in Matthew's concluding comment at the end of the genealogy: "Thus 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 Messiah, fourteen generations" ([Matt 1:17](#)).

Matthew's summary here divides the history of Israel into three main periods, which matches the actual genealogy of verses 2-16. These periods are the pre-monarchial era up to David (verses 2-6a), the Davidic monarchy after David (verses 6b-11), and the time from the exile (when there were no Davidic kings) to the Messiah (verses 11-16).

The names listed in the first two periods (and some in the third period) recall aspects of Israel's history (most of the names after the exile are not found in any Old Testament genealogy).

Matthew's genealogy could thus be viewed as a compact recapitulation of Israel's history, the compressed backstory of Jesus the Messiah.

The question arises as to why Matthew divides the history of Israel into three sets of fourteen generations. None of the Old Testament genealogies are organized in terms of fourteen generations. Genesis 5 and [Ruth 4:18-22](#) each have ten generations, while the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 1-9 has sixty-four. So why fourteen?

The explanation for the number fourteen is actually widely agreed upon by those who study Matthew. It is the sum of the number of the Hebrew consonants in the name *David*.

Even in English we sometimes use letters for numbers, as when we number the points in an article or presentation A, B, C, etc. (meaning 1, 2, 3, etc.).

This practice in Hebrew is called gematria and each of the twenty-two consonants of the Hebrew alphabet (the vowel points are not counted as letters of the alphabet) represents a number from 1 through 22

(although Matthew writes in Greek, it is easy to see which Hebrew consonants stand behind the Greek spelling he uses).¹⁹

The three Hebrew consonants of David's name (represented in English by D-V-D) stand for 4, 6,

and 4, which when added together equals fourteen.²⁰ So by giving us fourteen generations in each period, Matthew is calling attention to David as a crucial figure in the story of Israel.²¹

Beyond the fact that Matthew is the only Gospel that begins by calling Jesus the “son of David,” ([Matthew 1:1](#)), **the name David is mentioned five times in his genealogy** (**Matthew 1:1, 6, 17**), even when (as we shall see) it is not strictly necessary and actually seems out of place (as if Matthew is trying use the name *David* as often as he can).

Also, **a careful reading of Matthew’s Gospel shows a particular emphasis on Jesus as the “son of David”**; this is in contrast to the other Gospels, where this title is used of Jesus in only two passages each in Mark and Luke and not at all in John.²²

Soon after the genealogy, [Matthew 2:6](#) alludes to Jesus’s Davidic status in the quote from [Micah 5:2](#) (5:1 in the Hebrew Masoretic Text), which mentions the Messiah coming from Bethlehem (David’s hometown). Later on, various people directly call Jesus “Son of David” or wonder if he is David’s son, especially in connection with his healings ([Matthew 9:27](#); [12:23](#); [20:30-31](#)).

Matthew is also the only Gospel where the phrase “Son of David” is added to the Hosannas shouted

in the acclaim Jesus receives on his entry into Jerusalem ([Matthew 21:9](#), [15](#))—which is, of course, the “city of David” ([2 Sam 5:7](#)).

So **Matthew’s genealogy puts us on notice that Jesus’s relationship to David is going to be significant in his Gospel.** Yet, while the genealogy, along with aspects of Matthew’s narrative, sets us up for understanding Jesus as “Davidic” in some sense, Jesus himself will challenge any simple identification, by indicating that the Messiah is David’s *lord*, not his equal ([Matthew 22:42-45](#)).²³

So by giving us fourteen generations in each period, Matthew is calling attention to David as a crucial figure in the story of Israel.

[#Annotations in the Genealogy from Abraham to David](#)

Within the first set of fourteen generations (from Abraham to David), Matthew inserts a number of annotations or asides. Three of these annotations refer to particular women in the history of Israel—Tamar ([Matt 1:3](#)), Rahab ([Matt 1:5](#)), and Ruth ([Matt 1:5](#))—and Matthew mentions them as the mothers of particular figures in the genealogy. Each of these women made an important contribution to the story of Israel, whether in the period of the ancestors (Tamar), the conquest (Rahab), or the judges (Ruth). These three women are the first of five whom Matthew will mention in his genealogy. Each might be viewed negatively by some readers of the Gospel, since Tamar solicited sex with Judah, her father-in-law, Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute, and Ruth was a Moabite, a member of a group prohibited from joining Israel ([Deut 23:3](#)). Yet none of these three is judged negatively by any Old Testament text. Indeed, they are all positively valued for their respective roles in the history of Israel (Judah even calls Tamar “righteous” in [Gen 38:26](#)).

Without Rahab, Israel would never have been successful in entering the Promised Land; without Tamar and Ruth there would have been no Davidic monarchy (since the line of descent passed through their children). So the

mention of these three mothers of Israel recalls in summary form aspects of Israel's ancient story. They also prepare us for Mary, whom some readers might view negatively because of her premarital pregnancy, yet without whom there would be no Messiah (this story is recounted right after Matthew's genealogy).

The mention of Rahab, Tamar, and Ruth in Matthew's gospel prepare us for Mary, without whom there would be no Messiah.

There are other annotations that Matthew inserts in the first fourteen names from Abraham to David. He mentions not just Judah, whose line leads to David, but adds "and his brothers" ([Matt 1:2](#)), thus keeping the entirety of Israel in view (Judah and his brothers are the origin of the twelve tribes). He notes that Tamar was the mother not just of Perez, David's ancestor, but also Perez's twin brother Zerah ([Matt 1:3](#))—twins in the Old Testament often signify God's blessing. And when he gets to David (the climax of the first set of fourteen names), he specifically adds "the king" ([Matt 1:6](#)), thus emphasizing this aspect of David's identity.

[#Why Does Matthew Spell Some of the Names Differently?](#)

One of the strange things in Matthew's list of names is that while he clearly depends on earlier genealogies in the Bible (especially Ruth and 1 Chronicles), he often changes the spelling of names (sometimes changing the name entirely); we don't always notice this in English translations, since some translations harmonize the spellings between Matthew and his Old Testament sources.

In the Abraham to David epoch, Matthew makes five changes. First, he replaces Israel with *Jacob*; this is understandable, since they are the same

person and the former is found in the Hebrew of 1 Chronicles 1:34, while the latter is in the Greek Septuagint of the same verse. But Matthew also changes Ram to *Aram*, Salmah to *Salmon*, Boaz to *Boas*, and Obed to *Yobed* (all are plausible variant spellings).

For a long time scholars have puzzled over this, wondering what his motivation was. The answer to Matthew's changes (you may have guessed it) is **gematria**.²⁴

When the numerical values of the Hebrew consonants behind Matthew's Greek spelling of the fourteen names from Abraham to David (Matthew 1:2-6) are added up, their sum is 574. That turns out to be exactly the numerical value of *Abraham* (41), the first name in the list, multiplied by the numerical value of *David* (14), the last in the list.

The numbers would have been different (and would not have matched) if Matthew had kept the original spelling.

Matthew clearly wanted to emphasize the names Abraham and David for his readers at this point in the genealogy.

Right now this use of gematria might seem to be merely an oddity or quirk of Matthew's genealogy. The theological point of this will become clear, however, when we come to the next two sets of fourteen names (that's the next blog post).

Hang on to your hat!

Matthew's Genealogy of Jesus: Part II

In the final part of his four-part series, J. Richard Middleton continues his discussion on Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, from David to the Exile, culminating in Jesus the Messiah.

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[#Introduction](#)

Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:1-17) is structured as three sets of fourteen generations—from Abraham to David, from David to the Babylonian exile, and from the exile to Jesus the Messiah.

We have already seen, in the previous blog post, that fourteen is a symbolic number, calculated according to what is known as *gematria*, by adding up the numerical values of the Hebrew consonants in the name *David*. We looked briefly at phase 1 of the genealogy (from Abraham to David), where Matthew inserted the names of three significant mothers of Israel. He also changed the

spelling of some of the names from his Old Testament sources (Ruth and Chronicles), so that another level of gematria could come into play.²⁵

It is now time to examine the rest of Matthew's genealogy, the next two sets of fourteen generations—from David to the exile, then from the exile to Jesus.

[#From David to the Babylonian Exile](#)

Although Matthew states that it is fourteen generations from David to the exile ([Matt 1:17](#)), the fourteen generations technically begin with David's son, Solomon (1:6b) and end with Jeconiah ([Matt 1:11](#))—otherwise we would get fifteen generations. It is possible that Matthew says it is fourteen generations from *David* (not Solomon) to the exile as a way of continually keeping the name *David* before the reader.

All the fourteen names in this list are kings in the Davidic dynasty and Matthew bases his list on the genealogy in [1 Chron. 3:1-17](#).

Whereas David and Solomon ruled the united kingdom of Israel and Judah, the kingdom was divided in the days of Solomon's son, Rehoboam; so all the kings on Matthew's list from Rehoboam to Jeconiah are kings of Judah.

It is a bit unusual that Matthew should list Jeconiah (also known as Jehoiachin) as the last king before the exile, since Zedekiah reigned in Jerusalem after Jeconiah was taken into exile ([2 Kings 24:8-20](#)).

Jeconiah's deportation to Babylon is probably why the Chronicles genealogy refers to him as "the captive" ([1 Chron 3:17](#)); it looks like Matthew was influenced by this note in 1 Chronicles.

Although most of Matthew's genealogy is simply a listing of which king descends from which, he ends the fourteen generations of the monarchy with an expansion: "Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon" ([Matt 1:11](#)). Just as the earlier phrase "Judah and his brothers" (in [Matt 1:2](#)) alluded to the entirety of Israel (the twelve tribes come from the twelve brothers), so the repetition of the identical words "and his brothers" after Jeconiah's name in connection with the exile may signify the total ending of the Davidic monarchy.

#David as the High Point?

Some readers of Matthew's genealogy have suggested there is a significant difference between this negative valuation of phase 2 (David to the exile) and what seems like a positive valuation of phase 1 (Abraham to David). Whereas phase 2 ends in a low point (the Babylonian exile), phase 1 ends on a high (David, who founded a royal dynasty). This interpretation often appeals to the book of Judges, which covers part of the period represented by Matthew's first fourteen names. Judges ends with two juxtaposed statements in one verse: "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" ([Jdg 21:25](#)). Although there is no grammatical link in Hebrew between the two statements, it might be thought that the first (no king) is an explanation for the second (moral chaos), so that the monarchy could be regarded as a solution to the moral problem of the period.

This idea seems to be reinforced by the book of Ruth, which is placed in our English Bibles immediately following Judges. Since Ruth ends with the genealogy of David ([Ruth 4:18-22](#)), this might suggest that the Davidic monarchy brings resolution to the chaos of the time. *Matthew not only draws on Ruth's genealogy for the names from Perez to David (in phase 2), but when he gets to David he specifically adds, "the king."* Could Matthew himself be suggesting that the Davidic monarchy is God's culminating solution to the moral chaos that characterized the era of the judges? Is *that* why Matthew emphasizes David?

Certainly, the second batch of names in Matthew's genealogy (Solomon to Jeconiah) represents a downward spiral, concluding with the definitive ending of the Davidic monarchy in the deportation to Babylon.

So we might think that Matthew is contrasting the upward turn in phase 1 of his genealogy (Abraham to David) with the downward spiral in phase 2 (Solomon to Jeconiah).

#Matthew's Critique of David

But that contrast is only on the surface. A deeper look suggests that the Davidic line not only ended in crisis, but *began* in crisis, with a steep initial dip downwards. Matthew gives notice of this negative beginning by including an important *fourth* mother of Israel, after the three he previously mentioned in the genealogy from Abraham to David.

Having cited Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth explicitly by name, Matthew avoids giving the name of the fourth woman (Bathsheba). Instead, he says that David became the father of Solomon by “the wife of Uriah” (2:6b)—a clear reference to the episode of David's adultery, followed by his murder of Bathsheba's husband Uriah. **This pointed way of referring to Bathsheba indicates that the downward spiral of the monarchy, which ended in Babylonian exile, began with none other than *David himself*.**

Although Matthew derives the list of Davidic kings from the Chronicles genealogy, he does not follow the sanguine *narrative* in Chronicles of David's reign; that narrative omits entirely the episode with Bathsheba and Uriah. Instead,

Matthew draws on the narrative of 2 Samuel 11-12, which not only recounts David's egregious sins, but pronounces judgment on David's "house" (his family and his dynasty), a judgment that comes to fruition in the deportation to Babylon.

So Matthew is not holding up David as an ideal figure. Rather, his genealogy signals a critique of David—something that becomes clear from a careful reading of his Gospel.²⁶ From start to finish, the monarchy (even the much touted Davidic monarchy) was essentially a failed experiment.

So Matthew is not holding up David as an ideal figure. Rather, his genealogy signals a critique of David—something that becomes clear from a careful reading of his Gospel. From start to finish, the monarchy (even the much touted Davidic monarchy) was essentially a failed experiment.

#The Significance of Names and Numbers in Phase 2 (David to the Exile)

Although Matthew derives his list of kings from 1 Chronicles 3:10-19, he omits some of the kings listed in the Chronicles genealogy in order to get the number of generations down to **fourteen**. Besides the omission of Zedekiah at the end (after Jeconiah), three

kings are missing between Jehoram and Uzziah ([Matt 1:8](#)) and four are missing between Josiah and Jeconiah ([Matt 1:11](#)). And...

...just as he did in the genealogy from Abraham to David, Matthew changes the spelling of some of the names in his list of kings.

Some of his spellings diverge from the Hebrew of 1 Chronicles since he is following the Greek Septuagint. But two are unique to him—*Asaph* for Asa ([Matt 1:7-8](#)) and *Amos* for Amon ([Matt 1:10](#)). Scholars have puzzled about these two changes, wondering if Matthew is alluding to the temple musician mentioned in some psalms headings (Psalms 50, 73-83) and to the famous eighth-century prophet (though neither was a king). However, *the explanation for his changes is once again (you guessed it) gematria.*

The sum of all the numerical values of the fourteen names—as Matthew spells them—in the list from David to the exile is 560. This is exactly the number we get when we multiply the numerical value of David (14) with Jeconiah (40), the last king listed; this accounts for Matthew's variant spellings of the names, including Asaph and Amos.

While this playing with numbers might seem to contemporary readers as an unnecessary quirk (he could make his points without it), **it is another way in which Matthew reinforces his desire to keep the name *David* before us.**

If the genealogy of Abraham to David suggests great possibilities for Israel, the genealogy of “from David to the deportation to Babylon” (Matt 1:17) affirms that these possibilities were squandered by the monarchy, beginning with David himself.

#From the Exile to Jesus the Messiah

The final phase of Matthew’s genealogy starts with two names from [1 Chronicles 3:17, 19](#), but the next nine names are not derived from any known genealogy.

These names cover the postexilic period, suggesting that there is continuity of generations, even though we might not have any narratives brought to mind by the names.

After the nine unknown names, the genealogy ends with, “Joseph the husband of Mary, from whom was born Jesus, who is called Messiah” (1:16).

Mary is the 5th woman mentioned in Matthew’s genealogy (Tamar, Rahab,

Ruth, and “the wife of Uriah.”) Like these four, there is a certain oddity about Mary; she does not quite fit the norm.

At first glance, she does not seem fully upright, given that she gets pregnant prior to her marriage. But also, **like the four before her, she is not to be judged negatively, since she is the definitive vehicle God chose to bring Jesus into the world (the summary in 1:16 is expanded into the narrative of Jesus’s birth in 1:18-25).**

Indeed, Mary is the mother of Israel’s longed-for Messiah, the one who will “save his people from their sins” ([Matt 1:21](#)). Without Mary, there would be no salvation for Israel.

#The Problem of the Missing Generation

Matthew says there were “fourteen generations from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah” ([Matt 1:17](#)), but gives only thirteen names...

starting with Shealtiel (the first on his list after the exile) and ending with Jesus.

This shortfall is another puzzle for commentators trying to understand Matthew’s genealogy. But it turns out there is an explanation. So, let me explain.

No, there is no time; **let me sum up.**

If we add up all the generations in the three phases of Israel's history that Matthew lists—from Abraham to Jesus—there are only 41 generations (14+14+13), not 42 (14+14+14), as Matthew implies. Yet the number 41 is significant since 41 is the numerical value of the name *Abraham*.

So having Jesus in forty-first place in the genealogy beginning with Abraham may be Matthew's way of locating him as *the* definitive descendant of Abraham. Indeed, Matthew begins his Gospel by calling Jesus “**the son of Abraham**” ([Matt 1:1](#)).

When we add up the numerical value of the thirteen names Matthew gives from the exile to Jesus, we get a sum of 546; but this number yields nothing special. However, it is important to note that Matthew ends phase 3 of his genealogy not simply with *Jesus*, but with “Jesus, who is called *Messiah*” (1:16); and he specifically said there were “fourteen generations from the deportation to Babylon to the *Messiah*” ([Matt 1:17](#)).

So what happens if we treat *Messiah* as the fourteenth name in phase 3, even though it is a title, not technically a name (and certainly does not represent an extra generation)? Well, the numerical value of the Hebrew word *Messiah* is 42, and *Messiah* is in forty-second place in Matthew's genealogy.²⁷

Then, if we add 42 to the sum of the previous thirteen names, we get a total of 588. Now we do have an important number. It turns out that David (14) multiplied by Messiah (42) is exactly 588.

This is one more way that Matthew keeps the name *David* before his readers—at least, those readers who understand Jewish gematria.

But that's not the end of it...

What is the numerical total of all the names (including Messiah) listed in Matthew's genealogy? That would be 574 (phase 1) + 560 (phase 2) + 588 (phase 3), totaling 1,722. And 1,722 is the exact number we get when we multiply the numerical value of Abraham (41), who begins the entire genealogy, with the numerical value of Messiah (42), the climax and culmination of the genealogy.

#One Greater Than David Is Here

Okay, we've had a bit of fun (or, at least, Matthew has). But it's time to reckon with Matthew's serious purpose in opening his Gospel with this highly stylized genealogy.

First of all, it is clear that Matthew is not focused on what we would call historical accuracy.

Rather, he is intent on making particular theological points, especially about the *telos* or end point of his genealogy—Jesus the Messiah.

Matthew's genealogy, which begins with Abraham, is best understood as a recapitulation of Israel's history, summing up that history in terms of three historical periods and rooting Jesus firmly in that history, as its culmination and goal.

Although all the Gospels affirm Jesus's Jewishness and portray him as a faithful descendant of Abraham, **Matthew's Gospel stands out in the number of times it explicitly quotes the Old Testament, typically noting that some event in Jesus's life fulfilled Scripture in some way.**

But Abraham is not just the ancestor of Israel and Jesus. Abraham is important for Matthew also because of God's promise that the nations would be blessed through him and his descendants ([Gen 12:3](#); [18:18](#); [22:18](#); [26:4](#); [28:14](#)).

It is, therefore, no coincidence that Matthew's Gospel culminates in the Great Commission ([Matt 28:18-20](#)), where Jesus sends his followers out to make disciples of all nations (precisely as a way of implementing the Abrahamic promise).

And then there is David, whose name is central to the very organization of Matthew's genealogy.

Just as the name *David* (the gematria of which is 14) is listed in the fourteenth generation from Abraham, so the Messiah is listed in the fourteenth generation after the exile—hinting that this will be a new “David.”

Jesus thus represents a Davidic restart after the demise of the monarchy in the Babylonian exile.