



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.

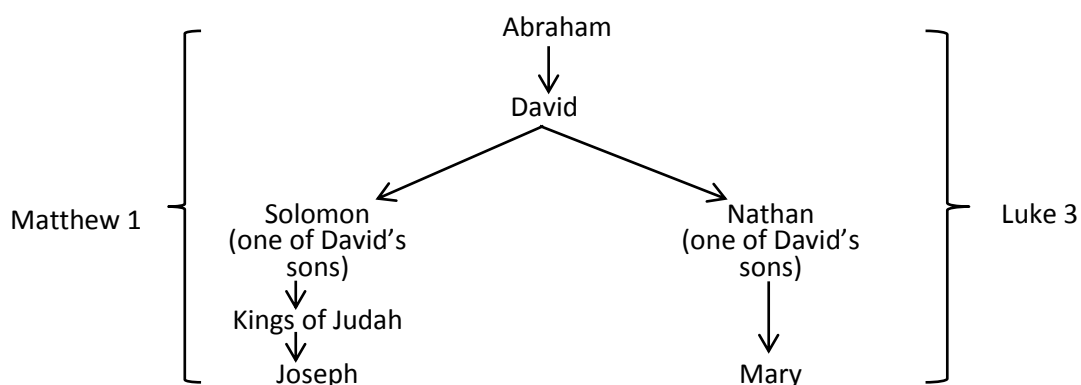
"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

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). |



Chapter 2: The Visit of the Wise Men

Bethlehem – the Birthplace of Jesus (2:1, 5, 6)

The Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, ordered people to register at the town from which their family came. Joseph was descended from King David, who came from Bethlehem, so Joseph and Mary had to journey from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem to register. When they reached Bethlehem there was no room for them to stay and so the Son of God was born in very humble circumstances. The record of the birth of Jesus is only found in Matthew and Luke, although the other Gospels also tell us that he is the Son of God. Luke's Gospel records the visit of the shepherds who were local men and therefore Jewish. Matthew writes about the wise men who were Gentiles and came from far away. The Lord God wanted both Jews and Gentiles to witness the arrival of His Son.

The Wise Men (2:1-12)

Matthew chapter 2 describes the visit of these wise men (called 'Magi' in some Bible versions) to the infant Jesus. Matthew does not tell us who the wise men were, or exactly where they came from, but he shows us that people were expecting the Christ, the saviour and king promised by God. It was natural to expect the new king to be born in Jerusalem, the capital city, which is near Bethlehem, and so the wise men went first to Herod's palace in that city. Notice that they described Jesus as "*he who has been born King of the Jews*".

The wise men followed a star which led them to Jesus. We are given no details about it; some think that it is unlikely that it was a natural star, planet or comet because these distant heavenly bodies would not shine over just one building. Because the wise men had been looking at the skies for signs of the King of the Jews, perhaps God provided an unusually bright light in the sky just as He did with the Apostle Paul (Acts 26:13). It is possible that only the wise men were allowed to see the light (see 2 Kings 6:17).

THE GIFTS BROUGHT BY THE WISE MEN

These remind us of the three aspects of the work of the Lord Jesus.

- Gold – is linked with kingship; Jesus would be a king.
- Frankincense – is linked with the priesthood; Jesus would ascend to heaven to be a High Priest for his followers.
- Myrrh – used when preparing a body for burial; it pointed forward to the death of Jesus.

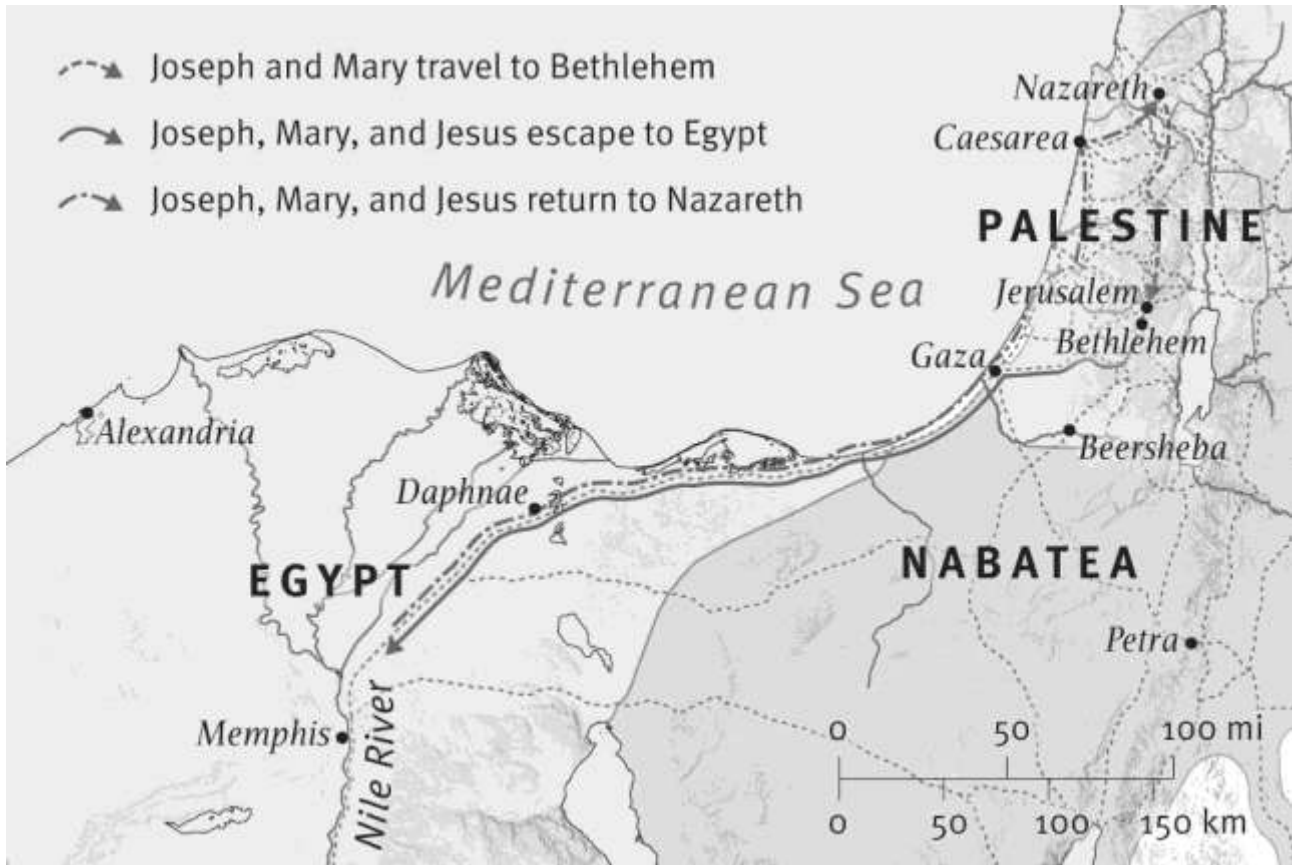
Herod

King Herod (sometimes called Herod the Great), whom the wise men visited, came from a family that had become wealthy and powerful by serving the Romans, who controlled Israel at this time. He was a jealous and suspicious man who even killed some of his own family because he thought they had been disloyal to him.

When Herod heard from the wise men about the birth of Jesus he tried to have the child killed because he thought Jesus would be a rival and threaten his power. He had no intention of worshipping Jesus. However God protected Joseph, Mary and the child who all escaped to Egypt where they were safe from the wicked king.

Sadly Jesus' own people did not recognise him as their king and crucified him; but the Lord Jesus will be king over the Jews, and indeed king of the whole world, when he returns to the earth.







Chapter 3: John the Baptist

The Work of John the Baptist (3:1-12)

John the Baptist had an important job to do: he was to announce and prepare the people for the coming of Jesus.

John called on people to *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”*. The word ‘repent’ means ‘to have a change of mind’. People who understand that they are sinners must repent. They must have a change of mind and seek to turn:

- **away** from their life of selfishness and sin
- **to** God and obey Him.

The work of John the Baptist had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah many years earlier. John quotes Isaiah’s prophecy applying it to his own work.

“For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight”.
(Isaiah 40:3)

John’s mother, Elizabeth, had been unable to have children and was past the age of child bearing when John was born. As Luke 1:13 records, John’s birth was a miracle.

John baptized people who had confessed their sins showing that they had truly repented. God then forgave their sins through this repentance and their baptism. This is why Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3 call John’s baptism a *“baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”*.

Baptism is both the end of an old, sinful life and the beginning of a new life in which we must try to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. John taught and baptized people to prepare them for the coming of Jesus. Jesus is at the centre of God’s purpose and he is much more important than John the Baptist. John understood this and told them that he was not worthy to carry the shoes of the one who would come after him (Jesus).

The Baptism of Jesus by John (3:13-17)

Verse 13 records Jesus coming to John for baptism. John was unwilling to baptize him at first, because he knew that Jesus was far greater than he. John described Jesus as *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). Jesus did not need to repent, as he had done no sin, but when John asked him why he had come to be baptized Jesus said that it was to *“fulfil all righteousness”*. Jesus’ baptism was an act



of obedience. He did everything his Father asked him to do.

Baptism is a symbol of dying with Christ. This was the start of Jesus’ public ministry and, by being baptized, he was publicly showing that he was willing to go forward and die on the cross for the sins of those he came to save.

Baptism must be a positive commitment to serve the Lord, it marks a new beginning. It must be the start of a new way of life. This is why John told the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to be baptized to *“Bear fruit in keeping with repentance”*. They thought they had a right to God’s blessings just because they were

descended from Abraham. But they had to obey God as Abraham did, and needed to show a humble repentant spirit.

Jesus was baptized by complete immersion in water and not by sprinkling because:



- the baptism took place in the River Jordan
- verse 16 says that “*when Jesus was baptized, immediately **he went up from the water***”.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, God sent His Spirit, like a dove, upon Jesus. There was also a voice from heaven. This showed that God was pleased with Jesus and that he really is the Son of God.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Notice the expression ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ (it is used only in Matthew’s Gospel). This means the kingdom that belongs to heaven, or belongs to God who is in heaven. It means exactly the same as ‘the Kingdom of God’ which is how the other Gospel writers describe it. The Bible never refers to a kingdom in heaven where people go when they die. God’s kingdom will be here on the earth.

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Answers to most questions can be found in the lessons or Bible passages given. Please write your answers on this question paper and return them in the envelope provided:

Questions on Chapter 1

- 1a Who was the mother of Jesus?

- 1b Who was the father of Jesus?

- 1c What does *she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit* mean (Matthew 1:18)?

- 2 What does the name Jesus mean? (Look at Matthew 1:21.)

- 3 What does this chapter tell us about Joseph and his character?

- 4a Which of the promises God made to Abraham do you think is the most important? Explain why.

- 4b What promise was made to King David about the Lord Jesus? (See 2 Samuel 7; Luke 1:32-35 and Lesson 15 of the 40 Lesson course).

- 4c When will the promise made to David finally come true?

Questions on Chapter 2

- 1 The Old Testament is quoted often in this chapter, what does this teach us about the Old Testament?
- 2 Over which nation was Jesus born to be king (verse 2)?
- 3 What did Micah prophesy hundreds of years before Jesus was born (Micah 5:2)?
- 4 Why do verses 20 and 22 say *the child and his mother* and not *your child* ?

Questions on Chapter 3

- 1 What must a person do before being baptized?
- 2 Where did John baptize people?
- 3 Why was John not willing at first to baptize Jesus?

What two signs followed the baptism of Jesus?