**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MATTHEW-001. MATTHEW'S GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. 2. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; 3. And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; 4. And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; 5. And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; 6. And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias; 7. And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; 8. And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias; 9. And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias; 10. And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias; 11. And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon: 12. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel; 13. And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; 14. And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; 15. And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; 16. And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."*

*Matthew 1:1-16*

To begin a Gospel with a genealogy strikes us modern Westerns as singular, to say the least of it. To preface the Life of Jesus with an elaborate table of descents through forty-one generations, and then to show that the forty-second had no real connection with the forty-first, strikes us as irrelevant. Clause after clause comes the monotonous begat, till the very last, when it fails, and we read instead: Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus. So, then, whoever drew up this genealogy knew that Jesus was not Joseph's son. Why, then, was he at the pains to compile it, and why did the writer of the Gospel, if he was not the compiler, think it important enough to open his narrative? The answer lies in two considerations: the ruling idea of the whole Gospel, that Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah, David's son and Israel's king; and the characteristic ancient idea that the full rights of sonship were given by adoption as completely as by actual descent. Joseph was of the house and lineage of David, and Joseph took Mary's first-born as his own child, thereby giving Him inheritance of all his own status and claims. Incidentally we may remark that this presentation of Jesus as Joseph's heir seems to favour the probability that He was regarded as His reputed father's first-born child, and so disfavours the contention that the brethren of Jesus were Joseph's children by an earlier marriage. But, apart from that, the place of this table of descent at the beginning of the Gospel makes it clear that the prophecies of the Messiah as David's son were by the Hebrew mind regarded as adequately fulfilled by Jesus being by adoption the son of Joseph, and that such fulfilment was regarded as important by the evangelist, not only for strengthening his own faith, but for urging his Lord's claims on his fellow-countrymen, whom he had chiefly in view in writing. Such external fulfilment goes but for little with us, who rest Jesus claims to be our King on more inward and spiritual grounds, but it stands on the same level as other similar fulfilments of prophecy which meet us in the Gospels; such as the royal entry into Jerusalem, riding upon an ass, in which the outward, literal correspondence is but a finger-post, pointing to far deeper and truer realisation of the prophetic ideal in Jesus.

What, then, did the evangelist desire to make prominent by the genealogy? The first verse answers the question. We need not discuss whether the title, The book of the generations of Jesus Christ, applies to the table of descent only, or to the whole chapter. The former seems the more probable conclusion, but the point to note is that two facts are made prominent in the title; viz. that Jesus was a true Jew, forasmuch as He also is a son of Abraham, and was the true king of Israel, being the Son of David, of whom prophets had spoken such great things. If we would take in the full significance of Matthew's starting-point, we must set by the side of it those of the other three evangelists. Mark plunges at once, without preface or allusion to earlier days, into the stir and stress of Christ's work, slightly touching on the preliminaries of John's mission, the baptism and temptation, and hurrying on to the call of the fishermen, and the busy scenes on the Sabbath in Capernaum. Luke has his genealogy as well as Matthew, but, in accordance with his universalistic, humanist tone, he traces the descent from far behind Abraham, even to Adam, which was the son of God, and he works in the reverse order to Matthew, going upwards from Joseph instead of downwards to him. John soars high above all earthly birth, and begins away back in the Eternities before the world was, for his theme is not so much the son of Joseph who was the son of David and the son of Abraham, or the son of Adam who was the son of God, as the Eternal Word who was with God, and entered into history and time when He became flesh. We must take all these points of view together if we would understand any of them, for they are not contradictory, but complementary.

The purpose of Matthew's genealogy is further brought out by its symmetrical arrangement into three groups of fourteen generations each--an arrangement not arrived at without some free manipulating of the links. The sacred number is doubled in each case, which implies eminent completeness. Each of the three groups makes a whole in which a tendency runs out to its goal, and becomes, as it were, the starting-point for a new epoch. So the first group is pre-monarchical, and culminates in David the King. Israel's history is regarded as all tending towards that consummation. He is thought of as the first King, for Saul was a Benjamite, and had been deposed by divine authority. The second group is monarchical, and it, too, has a drift, as it were, which is tragically marked by the way in which its last stage is described: Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time that they were carried away to Babylon. Josiah had four successors, all of them phantom kings;--Jehoahaz, who reigned for three months and was taken captive to Egypt; his brother Jehoiakim, a puppet set up by Egypt, knocked down by Babylon; his son Jehoiachin, who reigned eleven years and was carried captive to Babylon; and last, Zedekiah, Josiah's son, under whom the ruin of the kingdom was completed. The genealogy does not mention the names of these ill-starred brethren, partly because it traces the line of descent through Jeconias or Jehoiachin, partly because it despises them too much. A line that begins with David and ends with such a quartet! This was what the monarchy had run out to: David at the one end and Zedekiah at the other, a bright fountain pouring out a stream that darkened as it flowed through the ages, and crept at last into a stagnant pond, foul and evil-smelling. Then comes the third group, and it too has a drift. Unknown as the names in it are, it is the epoch of restoration, and its bright consummate flower is Jesus who is called the Christ. He will be a better David, will burnish again the tarnished lustre of the monarchy, will be all that earlier kings were meant to be and failed of being, and will more than bring the day which Abraham desired to see, and realise the ideal to which prophets and righteous men unconsciously were tending, when as yet there was no king in Israel.

A very significant feature of this genealogical table is the insertion in it, in four cases, of the names of the mothers. The four women mentioned are Thamar a harlot, Rachab another, Ruth the Moabitess, and Bathsheba; three of them tainted in regard to womanly purity, and the fourth, though morally sweet and noble, yet mingling alien blood in the stream. Why are pains taken to show these blots in the scutcheon? May we not reasonably answer--in order to suggest Christ's relation to the stained and sinful, and to all who are strangers from the covenants of promise. He is to be a King with pity and pardon for harlots, with a heart and arms open to welcome all those who were afar off among the Gentiles. The shadowy forms of these four dead women beckon, as it were, to all their sisters, be they stained however darkly or distant however remotely, and assure them of welcome into the kingdom of the king who, by Jewish custom, could claim to be their descendant.

The ruling idea of the genealogy is clearly though unostentatiously shown by the employment of the names Jesus Christ and Christ, while throughout the rest of this Gospel the name used habitually is Jesus. In verse 1 we have the full title proclaimed at the very beginning; then in verse 16, Jesus who is called Christ repeats the proclamation at the end of the genealogy proper, while verse 17 again presents the three names with which it began as towering like mountain peaks, Abraham, David, and--supreme above the other two, the dominant summit to which they led up, we have once more Christ. Similarly the narrative that follows is of the birth of Jesus Christ. That name is never used again in this Gospel, except in one case where the reading is doubtful; and as for the form Jesus who is called Christ, by which He is designated in the genealogy itself, the only other instance of it is on the mocking lips of Pilate, while the uniform use of Jesus in the body of this Gospel is broken only by Peter in his great confession, and in, at most, four other instances. Could the purpose to assert and establish, at the very outset, His Messianic, regal dignity, as the necessary pre-supposition to all that follows, be more clearly shown? We must begin our study of His life and works with the knowledge that He, of whom these things are about to be told, is the King of Israel.