The Genealogy of Christ
Matthew 1:1-17
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I.   The Person of the Christ (1:1-4:11)

   A.   The Incarnation of the Christ (1:1-2:23)

   1.   The Genealogy of the King (1:1-17)

The Introduction of Jesus the Messiah

The genealogy of Christ is introduced in the language of Genesis 2:4 and 5:1 in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. "The book of the genealogy of" points to Christ's ancestry in a way that is rooted in the structure of the Old Testament, corresponding to the Jewish audience of Matthew's gospel.

The genealogy begins with Abraham, rather than Adam (contra Luke) because Matthew's goal is to demonstrate that Christ's lineage validates the claim that He is the legitimate Messiah of Israel. Abraham's position as the father of Israel through God's unilateral promises (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-18; 15:1-21; 17:1-19; 22:15-18) is the logical beginning of this record of Christ's ancestry.

This introduction inverts David and Abraham. While David lived a thousand years after God's promises to Abraham, he is listed first. This is not incidental for the genealogy centers upon David as a pivot in his construction of this list (1:17). Describing Jesus as the son of Abraham only advanced Him as of God's chosen people. Describing Jesus as the son of David advanced Him as the Messiah, for this is a messianic term in the Old Testament. Also, the lineage and promises to David were restrictive as a small subset of Jews would be a descendant of David. The promises to David were that he would be given an eternal throne and kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-17), which was to be fulfilled in the Messiah.

Jesus is called the son of Abraham second, for after His rejection as the Son of David by His people He would still fulfill the promise of Abraham of blessing to all the families of the earth. The meaningfulness of God's promise of blessing to all through God's covenant can be seen in Matthew's use of the covenantal name Abraham instead of Abram.

Jesus would be the Savior of the world, where the Gentiles would be included as His people. In other words, He is first presented as the King, the Son of David, before He is presented as the fulfillment of the universal promise God made as the Son of Abraham. In His Gospel, Matthew will first emphasize Christ as Sovereign before Christ as Savior.

The most difficult issue with this passage is the comparison of Matthew's genealogy with Luke's genealogy in Luke 2:23-38. While Luke traces the genealogy from Jesus back to Adam, Matthew traces the genealogy beginning with Abraham and moving forward to Jesus. Yet from the following table we can see the numerous discrepancies when we compare Matthew with the section of Luke's genealogy from Jesus to Abraham:

Matthew 1:2-17	Luke 3:23-34
Abraham	Abraham
Isaac	Isaac
Jacob	Jacob
Judah	Judah
Perez and Zerah by Tamar	Perez
Hezron	Hezron
Ram	Armi
Amminadab	Admin
Nahshon	Nahshon
Salmon	Sala
Boaz by Rahab	Boaz
Obed by Ruth	Obed
Jesse	Jesse
David	David
Solomon by the wife of Uriah	Nathan
Rehoboam	Mattasha
Abijah	Menna
Asa	Eliakim
Jehoshaphat	Jonam
Joram	Judas
	Simeon
Uzziah	Levi

Jotham	Matthat
Ahaz	Jorim
Hezekiah	Eleazar
Manasseh	Jesus
Amon	Er
Josiah	Elmadam
	Cosam
	Addi
	Melchi
Jeconiah	Neri
Sheatiel	Sheatiel
Zerubbabel	Zerubbabel
Abihud	Abiud
	Joanam
	Joda
	Josech
	Semein
	Mattathias
Eliakim	Maath
Azor	Naggai
Zadok	Esli
Achim	Nahum
Eliud	Amos
Eleazar	Mattathias
Matthan	Joseph
	Jannai
	Melchi
	Levi
	Matthat
Jacob	Heli
Joseph the husband of Mary	Joseph
Jesus	Jesus

There are several ways that are used to address the issue of the substantial difference. Adding to the challenge of reconciling these lists is that many in both lists we know nothing of in Scripture. Essentially, a person's theological perspective will determine how this problem will be approached.

More liberal interpreters will see this as another case of errors in the Bible and see no concern with such a wide difference in the lists. Their view of the historical accuracy of the Bible views this difficulty as further proof of their perspective. Conversely, many Bible believing Christians will simply ignore this difficulty in avoidance of any issue which might trouble their faith.

The most common solution to this problem is the view that Matthew gives the genealogy of Joseph and Luke gives the genealogy of Mary. The biggest point opposing this is that Luke does not overtly state that he is giving Mary's genealogy. He would have written after Matthew and was possibly aware of the text of Matthew and if so could have clarified this for us.

The reason this perspective is the best solution is Luke's phrasing in 2:23, "being supposedly the son of Joseph" which leads to the recognition that Joseph was not the actual ancestor of Jesus. He is possibly in this list as the husband of Mary with Heli having no sons of his own. Also, only Matthew's genealogy includes women so Luke's exclusion of Mary would be consistent had already been explained in his Gospel.

So we can reasonably conclude that Luke provided the actual lineage of Jesus, and Matthew recorded the validation of Jesus' royal lineage as a descendant of the male line of David. This fits well with Matthew's emphasis on the proof of Jesus' position as the nation's rightful king in his Gospel.

<u>The women in the genealogy</u>

While Jewish genealogies were patriarchal, there were cases that included women (Genesis 11:29, 22:20-24; 35:22-26; 1 Chronicles 2:18-21, 24, 34, 46-49; and 7:24). So the inclusion of women in Matthew's list is not unprecedented.

There are four women included in Matthew 1:2-17: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah.

One observation that has been noted from the days of the early church is the sinful background of some of the women.

- Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Jacob's son Judah and deceived him into a having a sexual relationship, thus bringing Perez into the line of Christ (Gen. 38).

- Rahab was a prostitute (Joshua 2:1, 6:17) who would have that stigma attached to her when she was reference later in the New Testament (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25).

- Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, was guilty of adultery with David (2 Samuel 11), although the biblical account places the focus of the blame upon David.

Ruth however is not presented with the stain of sin in the same way as the other three.

Another observation is that the women all come from Gentile lands.

- Tamar was the daughter of a Canaanite woman named Shua (Genesis 38:2)

- Rahab likewise was a Canaanite living in Jericho who saved the spies of Joshua at the outset of the conquest of the promised land. She would marry Salmon and become the mother (or grandmother) of Boaz.

- Ruth was a Moabite who married Boaz with whom she bore a son Obed in the lineage of Christ.

- Bathsheba would presumably be a Hittite like her husband, Uriah.

That all four women shared a Genitle background would advance Matthew's theme of Christ's mission to the Gentiles that would be developed later in the book.
This universality of His ministry would later be seen with the coming of the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12), the faith of the Roman centurion (Matthew 8:5-13), the faith of the Canaanite women (Matthew 15:21-28) and His final call for the disciples to go to the Gentile nations (Matthew 28:19).

There is a fifth woman in the genealogy of Christ listed: Mary. While Mary does not fit with either the sinful backgrounds or the foreign backgrounds of the other women, we can only conclude that either Matthew meant to contrast these women with Mary or the other four were included for a separate purpose.

Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, which includes Gentiles, women, and sinners. His redemption is beyond gender, ethnicity or the stain of egregious sin.

The structure of the names in the genealogy

The structure of Matthew's list clearly sets forth three distinct groups based upon eras of the history of Israel. Matthew 1:2 begins with Abraham and this first group concludes with David the king (1:6a). The unique notation of David as king, along with David identified in the opening sentence of the book, points to 1:6a as being the dividing point of the first group. David is the only person in this list with a title given to him.

The second dividing point within the three groupings is even clearer since it is an event rather than a person. "The time of the deportation to Babylon" (1:11b-12a) is placed as a marker between group two and group three.

Beyond the observable structure of the genealogical list, Matthew includes the explicit division in 1:17: From Abraham to David, from David to the deportation to Babylon, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah. He writes that each group has fourteen generations.

One challenge with Matthew's analysis of each group involves the number fourteen. When the list is examined, we find only the first and third group actually have thirteen generations listed with only the middle set having fourteen generations.

Matthew 1:2-6a	Matthew 1:6a-11	Matthew 1:11-16
Abraham/Isaac	David/Solomon	Jeconiah/Sheatiel
Isaac/Jacob	Solomon/Rehoboam	Sheatiel/Zerubbabel
Jacob/Judah	Rehoboam/Abijah	Zerubbabel/Abihud
Judah/Perez	Abijah/Asa	Abihud/Eliakim
Perez/Hezron	Asa/Jehoshaphat	Eliakim/Azor
Hezron/Ram	Jehoshaphat/Joram	Azor/Zadok
Ram/Amminadab	Jehoram/Uzziah	Zadok/Achim
Amminadab/Nahshon	Uzziah/Jotham	Achim/Eliud
Nahshon/Salmon	Jotham/Ahaz	Eliud/Eleazar
Salmon/Boaz	Ahaz/Hezekiah	Eleazar/Matthan
Boaz/Obed	Hezekiah/Manasseh	Matthan/Jacob
Obed/Jesse	Manasseh/Amon	Jacob/Joseph
Jesse/David	Amon/Josiah	Joseph/Jesus
	Josiah/Jeconiah	

There are various factors to be considered as we look at this difficulty. The first issue regards how the generations are grouped and where to begin and end. For example, in the first group there are actually fourteen names. If Abraham is counted as a generation, there becomes fourteen generations in the first group. Some have seen Mary as a generation in the third group. Both solutions seem artificial however.

Complicating the number fourteen is the second issue of Matthew's list being incomplete. For example, Matthew left out three generations between Solomon and Josiah that can be found in 1 Chronicles 3:10-14. So there is a problem with both the count and the list.

Regarding the accuracy of the count, we must recognize Matthew's ability to count is not in question. What is more likely is the perspective of grouping was different in Matthew's culture. Craig Bloomberg has observed an ancient literary practice of alternating between an inclusive practice of grouping and an exclusive practice of grouping in a series of groups. Thus the first and third sets are inclusive groups while the second set is exclusive. In other words, David's son Solomon becomes included in the first set as connected to David and Jeconiah's father Josiah becomes included in the third set as connected to Jeconiah.

Furthermore, it becomes clear that Matthew's goal in using the number fourteen was not to make a technical analysis of precise generations but rather he was making a symbolic point with the number fourteen. Once again, Matthew's literary convention is not our literary convention. He arranges material through his Gospel to make a literary point about Christ.

While clearly Matthew intended to group Christ's genealogy into sections of fourteen, what was his purpose in doing so?

Some have observed the significance of David in this passage and link the number fourteen to his name. In the Hebrew language, letters of the alphabet have numerical value. The three letters that comprise the name David in Hebrew have the value of four, six and four, with the total being fourteen. While this is probable, it is not mentioned in the text itself. Yet it does explain why the number fourteen is significant.

A simpler explanation is that the number fourteen served as an aid to memory. Rabbinical writings often used structure to aid in memory. Dividing the list into groups would help this. The number fourteen might also be double the number seven, which is the divine number. Thus there would be six sets of seven generations with the Messiah being the first of the seventh set.

Finally, there are three groups because of the significance of events dividing the sections. The premise of Matthew's Gospel is to demonstrate that Jesus is the King, the rightful heir to the throne of David. Therefore, the establishment of the royal line of David is essential to the development of the Messiah for Matthew. Thus the first section ends with "David the king."

The royal rule over the Jews ceased with the fall of Judah to Babylon. This end of the throne of David with the deportation to Babylon marks the end of the second section. That the Jews were without a king prepares for the coming of the Messiah. The final section then concludes with Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

Joseph the husband of Mary

The final aspect of this genealogy that we will examine is the grammar of Matthew 1:16. Unlike the rest of the names which use the active voice of the man as the subject as the father, Joseph is placed in the passive voice as "the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born." The word "who" is feminine and refers to Mary, further strengthening the point that Jesus was the biological descendant of Mary. This sets up the rest of chapter one which describes the virgin birth of Christ.

Conclusion

The general proof of the genealogy of Christ is given in Matthew 1:1 with the direct lineage to Abraham and David. Within the detailed structure there are various proofs of Jesus as the Messiah. Abraham is called by his covenantal name, Judah is singled out from his brothers, David is called the king and Joseph is included passively to allude to the virgin birth of Christ.

This genealogy traces from Abraham who first received the covenant through the crisis of the brothers of Judah, to David and the covenant that his descendant would reign over God's people, to the crisis of the deportation to Babylon, to the supernatural birth of the Messiah. God's faithfulness to fulfill His promise in the midst of sinful people stands out in this historical lineage.