

Have you ever wondered why the New Testament starts with a long list of names that are hard to pronounce? Any basic writing class will teach you to begin with a gripping introduction. I have put careful thought into the words of introduction that you are reading right now because introductions are where the attention is captured, and the expectation is set.

Matthew wrote a firsthand account of the most exciting story in the history of the world, and he started the story with a 42-generations long list of names. Because most of the names appear twice and there are a few siblings and mothers mentioned, there are 91 names to read in the first 17 verses of the book of Matthew. What was Matthew thinking?

It would be easy to skip over this list of names until we realize, it's not just a list of names. It was not a lack of creativity, laziness, or poor writing skills that caused Matthew to start with a genealogy. It was intentional. When we understand why he did this, we realize that *it is* an attention-grabbing introduction that sets a lofty expectation for the rest of the story.

Matthew starts with a bunch of names to demonstrate to his Jewish audience that Jesus was the one they were looking for!

My goal in exploring this list of names is that you might have fresh conviction that Jesus is the one you are looking for.

The Function of Gospel Genealogies

Matthew was not alone in starting his gospel with a genealogy to establish credibility. It is fascinating to notice how the gospel writers begin with different genealogies to support their different purposes in writing.

Mark is the only gospel without a genealogy. This serves Mark's purpose of presenting Jesus as a servant. A servant doesn't need credentials, so he needs no genealogy. This is an accurate portrayal of Jesus who "was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Philippians 2:6). He had the resume but was willing to set it aside to serve humanity.

Luke also has a genealogy. It is found in Luke 3:23-30. Luke lists different names that also pass through the lines of David and Abraham, but he doesn't stop there. Luke traces Jesus back to the son of Abraham, the son of God. Luke wrote to a Gentile audience emphasizing that Jesus came for the whole world so he traced Jesus back to the father of the human race, Adam.

John's gospel also has a genealogy, a short one. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The emphasis of John's writing was to show that Jesus is divine, so his genealogy traces itself all the way to the beginning as God.

The function of each genealogy is to give credibility to the point that is being made about Jesus. Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience presenting Jesus as Messiah and King, son of Abraham and son of David.

The Theme of Fulfillment

From the very first sentence of his gospel, Matthew writes through the lens of fulfillment.

Matthew 1:1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

The messianic prophecies of the Old Testament promised that the Messiah would come through the line of Abraham and David. Matthew starts there to prove that Jesus fulfills the messianic prophecies in his genealogy. Jesus is in fulfillment mode before he is born.

If you have a spouse, how did you know they were the one? If you have purchased a home, how did you know that it was the one? If you chose an outfit this morning, how did you know that it was the one?

We know it is the one when it meets whatever criteria has been established for it being the one. In the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew shows that Jesus meets the criteria of the Messiah.

We will explore how this genealogy proclaims that Jesus is the one using the outline given in verse 17... Abraham, David, Captivity, Christ.

Matthew 1:17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.

We are going to focus in on Abraham and David but first let's zoom out to notice how this theme of fulfillment drives Matthew's telling of the story of Jesus.

There are over 300 Old Testament specifications for the Messiah and the life of Christ was perfectly orchestrated to meet those specifications to communicate that he is the one. Matthew jumped on every opportunity to present Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and prophecies of the Messiah. Fulfillment of Messianic prophecies is the lens that Matthew tells the birth story of Jesus through.

Matthew tells the birth story and childhood of Jesus in 5 acts. He summarizes each act by highlighting how it fulfills scripture. Each time he quotes an Old Testament Messianic promise to make the fulfillment theme abundantly clear.

Consider this outlined version of the text to track this fulfillment theme.

Act 1: In Matthew 1:18-23 Jesus is born! Matthew concludes this act by quoting Isaiah 7:14 to show that Jesus fulfilled the naturally impossible virgin birth. Notice how obvious Matthew makes this connection.

Matthew 1:22-23 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

Act 2: In Matthew 2:1-12 the wise men visit Jesus and Herod finds out about the one born to be king. Matthew has the wise men quoting a Messianic promise (from Micah 5:2) when Herod asked where the child was to be born.

Matthew 2:5-6 So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ‘But you, Bethlehem, *in* the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.’”

Act 3: In Matthew 2:13-15 Joseph and Mary take the advice of an angel and flee to Egypt. Ah, another perfect fit in this Messianic fulfillment demonstration. So, Matthew drives it home by quoting Hosea 11:1.

Matthew 2:14-15 When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”

Act 4: In Matthew 2:16-18, Herod has all the male children under 2 killed. Mathew had to include this part of the story because it is a fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:15.

Matthew 2:17-18 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

Act 5: Matthew tells his version of the childhood of Jesus all the way through the death of Herod because that is when Joseph and Mary moved to Nazareth. Another fulfillment. This one was not a direct Old Testament quote but clearly a common interpretation of Messianic Prophecy among Matthew’s audience.

Matthew 2:23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

With each fulfillment Matthew is declaring, Jesus is the one. The declaration does not stop with the childhood of Jesus. John the Baptist shows up peaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come” (Matthew 2:2). Jesus is the one! Then, after Jesus convinces John to baptize him, “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15) there is literally a voice from heaven that says, “This is my beloved Son” (Matthew 3:17). Throughout his gospel account Matthew continues to make the argument, Jesus is the one you are looking for!

Matthew’s fulfillment argument is a compelling one that should cause non-believers from the 1st century to the present to pause and consider. Renown Messianic Jewish scholar David H. Stern, writes in his Jewish New Testament Commentary, “Prophecy fulfillment is the chief rational reason, based on empirical observation of historical events- that is, based on facts, for Jews and others to accept Yeshua as the Messiah.” The more variables and constraints, the

harder it becomes to fulfill each piece, and Jesus does. The text is precise, and the fulfillment stands defiantly against all reasonable probability.

Having introduced the fulfillment theme in Matthew, we return to the list of names following the outline given in verse 17... Abraham, David, Captivity, Christ.

Abraham

To have the credentials of the messiah Jesus had to be the Son of Abraham. In the eyes of the Jews in Jesus times, being children of Abraham was the basis of all credibility, the guarantee of salvation. You can hear this idea challenged when John the Baptist adds conviction to his message of repentance by saying, "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones." (Matthew 3:8-9).

Paul clarifies this connection between Abraham and Jesus.

Galatians 3:16 The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Judah are the first four names listed in the genealogy of Matthew 1. The Old Testament names each of these men in the line of the Messiah to come.

Genesis 22:17-18 I will surely bless you [Abraham] and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Numbers 24:17 "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.

Genesis 49:10 The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.

It was predicted, the Messiah would be a son of Abraham.

The significance of the prophecy goes beyond the element of prediction. We often think of prophecy as primarily prediction. The ancient Jewish understanding of prophecy was both prediction and pattern. This is why we see patterns repeated in the prophecies of the book of Daniel. Vision after vision presents the same pattern in parallel prophecies. Revelation is primarily an echo of the Old Testament. Jesus presented the fall of Jerusalem as a pattern for the end of the age. Matthew presents a theme of fulfillment both in prediction and pattern.

Not only was the Messiah predicted to be a son of Abraham, but Jesus was also patterned after the role of Abraham. As Abraham was sent by God as a foreigner to the land of Canaan from his

comfortable home in Ur, so God so loved the world that he sent his only son. As Abraham is the father of many nations so Jesus is the first born among the dead. He is the cornerstone on which a holy nation is established (1 Peter 2:9). While the Jews traced all their credibility back to father Abraham Jesus shocked them by saying, "Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58).

Not only is Jesus greater than their father Abraham (John 8:53), but he is also superior to angels (Hebrews 1). Matthew presents Jesus as the true patriarch. It doesn't all start with Abraham; it starts with Jesus.

As a son of Abraham Jesus fulfilled the prediction. As the patriarch of all the redeemed Jesus fulfilled the pattern of Abraham. As the creator of Abraham Jesus is the foundation of credibility. As the Jews looked to Abraham for their identity, belonging, and assurance, we are to look to Jesus for our identity, belonging, and assurance. As their legitimacy as a Jew was rooted in their connection with Abraham, so our belonging in the family of God is rooted in our connection with Christ.

Jesus is the new Abraham! What Abraham was to Israel, Jesus is to all who follow him!

Jesus is the one you are looking for. In your search for something credible to trust, Jesus is the patriarch who will never fail you.

David

Jesus meets the credentials of the Messiah as the Son of David.

Matthew's original audience would have known the Scriptures that assured that the Messiah must come through the line of David.

Isaiah 11:1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

2 Samuel 7:13 He[David] is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Isaiah 9:7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Jeremiah 23:5-6 "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this *is* His name by which He will be called."

The New Testament uses the term "Son of David" nearly 20 times in reference to Jesus. Again, we have a fulfillment in predictive prophecy. We also have a fulfillment in the pattern of

prophecy. Jesus fulfils the pattern of King David. Jesus has kingly power. Jesus has the right to rule.

With Matthew's focus on Jesus as king, he includes elements in his story which are very kingly and masculine which no other gospel writer includes.

- Only Matthew tells of an angel appearing to Joseph (Matthew 1:20, 24; 2:13).
- Only Matthew tells about King Herod searching for Jesus and killing the male children.
- Only Matthew tells of the wise men from the east.
- Only Matthew includes the reference to Jesus as the "King of the Jews".

Jesus is the new David! What David was to Israel, Jesus is to all who follow him!

Listen to the victorious power we find when we follow King Jesus, son of David.

Revelation 5:5 But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

Captivity

The next set of 14 generations is from David to the Babylonian Captivity. This is different. Matthew chooses not to focus on a person but on a situation, captivity. Matthew is emphasizing the pattern of prophecy to communicate that the Messiah would deliver us. These 14 generations go in the direction we all need to go, from captivity to Christ.

So far, Matthew has drawn parallels with two prominent Old Testament figures, Abraham and David. There is another parallel between Jesus and an Old Testament figure that is made in the first few chapters of Matthew. His name is not mentioned anywhere in the text, nor was he part of the family line of the Messiah, but his pattern is fulfilled.

If you were to list the three most prominent figures in the Old Testament you would probably include Abraham and David. Who is the third you would include?

Consider this pattern that the birth story of Jesus follows. What other major Old Testament figure shared this pattern?

- Born under oppressive conditions.
- A king feels threatened by a rising power. So, he commands his people to kill all the male children.
- But the parents of a chosen one hide their child from the King's wrath.
- The child finds safety in Egypt.
- Then the child comes out of Egypt.
- The great mission of his life is to deliver God's people from captivity and bring them to the promised land.

Yeah, it's Moses.

Jesus fulfills the pattern of Abraham, the father of Israel.

Jesus fulfills the pattern of David, the king of Israel.

And Jesus fulfills the pattern of Moses, the deliverer of Israel.

Jesus is presented, like Moses, as a loving savior and a capable leader.

There is more to this pattern. After Jesus was baptized, he was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil where he fasted for forty days and nights (Matthew 4:1-2). Do you see the parallel? Moses led the people into the wilderness where they wandered for 40 years. Only, Israel stayed there because of their unfaithfulness. And Moses was not allowed to leave from there into the Promised Land because of his unfaithfulness. Jesus didn't go into the wilderness because of unfaithfulness but to demonstrate his faithfulness.

Jesus is a deliverer who succeeds in every point of Israel's failure. At the end of his forty days fasting in the wilderness Jesus was tempted by Satan. As Moses was tempted to strike the rock for water, Jesus was tempted to turn stones to bread. Moses gave in to the temptation. Jesus didn't. As Israel continually tested God and complained against him, Jesus was tempted to put God to the test.ⁱ They failed. Jesus didn't. As Israel was tempted with the idolatry of a golden calf, Jesus was tempted to bow down and worship Satan.

During the wilderness wandering Moses wrote a book to call the people to covenant faithfulness. He pleaded with them to obey God. They did not live up to the things written in that book. Jesus responded to his temptations by quoting from scripture. All four quotations are from the book of Deuteronomy.ⁱⁱ The text that anchored Jesus in obedience was the very text that Israel disobeyed.

Just like the pattern in Matthew, we find righteousness in the covenant faithfulness of Jesus. We broke the covenant, so he came and kept our side of the covenant for us so we could be delivered from captivity.

Jesus is the new Moses! What Moses was to Israel, Jesus is to all who follow him!

We are looking for a savior. Matthew wants us to know that Jesus is the one we are looking for.

Christ

The genealogy in Matthew sets up Christ as the grand climax and conclusion. Christ makes the story complete.

For a mind-blowing picture of the completeness of Christ, consider an amazing pattern in the text known as **heptadic structures**. We are about to see that Matthew's intention for the genealogy is not limited to a couple of big names in his family line.

I believe that the Holy Spirit has inspired all of scripture. But I hadn't realized how thoroughly the hand of God has loaded this genealogy with meaning until I came across the work of Ivan Paninⁱⁱⁱ. Panin was a Russian immigrant to Germany and then to the US. In Germany he studied literature and linguistics. When he came to the US he studied Greek and Hebrew at Harvard, where he graduated in 1882 with a Masters of Literary Criticism. His reputation as a firm agnostic was so strong that when he became a Christian, at the age of 35, the local newspapers reported the news of his conversion.

It was his literary work that led to his conversion. He noticed some curious patterns in the linguistics of the Biblical text. He studied it further and found such extravagant patterns that he was convinced that the Bible was a supernatural work. He spent the rest of his life studying the linguistic and mathematical patterns in the Biblical text. The patterns I have learned about the genealogy of Matthew 1 come from his work.

The number 7 is a Biblical favorite. It is used 735 times (Interestingly, a multiple of 7, $7 \times 105 = 735$). The Bible presents 7 as the number of completeness, fullness, God's perfect number.

What Panin found is that all of the following totals from the first 17 verse of Matthew are divisible by seven:

1. Generations ($14+14+14=42$, $42/6=7$)
2. Words
3. Letters
4. Total Greek numerical value of the letters (42,364)
5. Vowels
6. Consonants
7. Words that begin with a vowel
8. Words that begin with a consonant
9. Nouns
10. Sentences the begin with a noun
11. Words that occur more than once
12. Words that occur in only one form
13. Male names
14. Words spoken by the angel

For the first factor there is a 1 in 7 chance of this happening by accident. When we add a second constraint there is a 1 in 49 chance, then 343, and so on. There is an exponential increase to the unlikelihood that this could happen by chance as we add more constraints.

Panin found more than I have listed. I found 24 listed on one website^{iv}. I stop at 14 because, hey, it is a multiple of seven. Seven to the 14th power is 678,223,072,849

Heptadic structures are even more densely represented in Mark. In the last 12 verses of Mark Panin found 75 linguistic totals that were factors of 7.

What is this communicating?

An obvious takeaway is that this is a compelling argument for the supernatural design of Scripture. It is intentional. Assuming there were only 14 heptadic factors in this genealogy. If there is no intentionality there is a 1 in 678,223,072,849 chance that it would come out the way it did. At random, it would take you 678 billion drafts to get one like Matthew did. Chuck Missler calculates that, with all the constraints Panin has found in this text, assume a supercomputer could spit out random drafts 400 million per second, 4 million computer year.^v

Now, if you were to attempt this intentionally how long might it take you? It would be a massive puzzle. With the best software available, it is hard to imagine solving this complicated puzzle in a lifetime. Matthew did it by hand on a scroll. I think he had some supernatural help.

It is more than a list of names. The genealogy of Matthew should make a strong case to the skeptic that the Bible is inspired by God. This list of names displays credibility.

There is something else these heptadic structures are communicating. If the pattern happened with the number 6 that would be just as impressive. But since it is the number 7, the number of completeness, there is a message of completeness being proclaimed. Jesus is our completeness. When his kingdom comes our lack is completed, our longings are satisfied, our weakness finds a power it can cling to, our insecurities are removed, because Jesus is the one we are looking for.

When I learned about heptadic structures, I started counting things. Quickly, I thought of verse 17, with its 3 sets of 14 generations. I was disappointed. If there were only 7 sets of seven I would have felt like I discovered something big. It would be a great example of the completeness in Christ if there were 7 sets of 14 but there are only 6. But then I saw it in another, more beautiful way.

We are familiar with a pattern of 7 in our weekly rhythm. We work 6 days and rest on the Sabbath.

In Leviticus, God set up a different heptadic structure of Sabbatical years.

Leviticus 25:1-4 And the LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a sabbath to the LORD. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the LORD. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard.

Then God gave an even larger set of sevens for a greater rest and celebration in the year of Jubilee.

Leviticus 25:8-12 ‘And you shall count seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years. ⁹ Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth *day* of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. ¹⁰ And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout *all* the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family. ¹¹ That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of its own accord, nor gather *the grapes* of your untended vine. ¹² For it *is* the Jubilee; it shall be holy to you; you shall eat its produce from the field.

In Matthew 1:17 we find 6 sets of 7... then Jesus. Jesus is the beginning of the 7th set of seven. He is also the end of it. Jesus is the generation of Jubilee. He brings us rest from our labor and freedom from captivity. He erases our debts. He gives us back what we have lost.

Jesus makes this connection explicit when he quotes from Isaiah about himself in Luke 4:18-19. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Jesus is the new Jubilee! What the year of Jubilee was to Israel, Jesus is to all who follow him!

Matthew wants us to know that Jesus is the one we are looking for.

Matthew wrote through the lens of fulfillment because his audience was skeptical that Jesus was the one they were looking for. If we are honest, there are times when we share their skepticism. There are times that we are not convinced that Jesus is the one who satisfies our desires, that Jesus is the one who can make us clean, or that Jesus is the one we need most at this stage of life. Matthew writes to convince us that every good thing you have ever put your hope in finds fulfillment in Jesus. He is the one you are looking for.

ⁱ God announces that the Israelites will remain the wilderness for 40 years in Numbers 14:33. The connection to the wilderness wondering and the testing God is strong. The reason that generations would not enter the promised land is that they tested God “these ten times” (Numbers 14:22).

ⁱⁱ Matt 4:4 & Deut 8:3; Matt 4:7 & Deut 6:16; Matt 4:10 & Deut 6:13 plus Deut 10:20

ⁱⁱⁱ If you are interested in learning more about Panin’s work I recommend the following videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0eZL2pGiBw> &

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aye8q9tIrws&list=PLHTnmbuJ5_-9M5TadOImTY3--s5CcMyTb

^{iv} <https://thephoenixenigma.com/the-heptadic-code-of-matthew-11-17/>

^v Chuck Missler, The Book of Matthew: A Commentary