

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 3, Chapter 1 Continued

In our previous lesson we studied at length the genealogy of Yeshua that opens Matthew's Gospel. We discovered that Matthew seems to have created a structure for his genealogy based on the numbers 3, 14, and 42. It is unknown by Bible research scholars whether this was an original thought for Matthew or if he merely found it in an earlier document and used it (all 3 Synoptic Gospels had to have used earlier documents to draw from because none of the writers were present with Christ). However no such earlier document with the same or a similar genealogy for Jesus has been discovered; that one might exist is purely conjecture.

An important point to keep in mind is that unlike in modern times when genealogies are meant to be precise reconstructions of one's direct family tree, that was not necessarily the goal of genealogies among the Hebrews in ancient times. Their goal was to prove something; and what was meant to be proved was flexible according to the author's agenda. So what we find in Matthew's genealogy seems to be an emphasis on the mathematics that in that era were considered somewhat mysterious and itself imparted a message. The scholarly name for this focus on numbers and their meaning is gematria. Clearly: being precise about Yeshua's ancestral tree was not the goal, because some generational names are skipped.

Matthew honed in on the importance of Christ being the son of David. Drawing upon that, we find that in Hebrew David's name consists of 3 letters, and the gematria value of his name is 14. So accordingly Matthew structured his genealogy by dividing up the long list of Yeshua's ancestors into 3 groups of 14, with David's name being listed (not surprisingly) as the 14th in the first group.

When you multiply 3 times 14 the result is 42. Due to the ongoing occupation of Rome, the bulk of the Holy Land Jewish population believed that they were either living in the End Times or that it was imminent. And because the advent of the Messiah was thought by most learned Jews in Matthew's era to be an End Times event, and because the Book of Daniel was highly popular in that same era as the source of End Times prognostications, then when we find in Daniel that in the End Times 42 months plays a crucial role, the connection between all of these numbers in a very numbers-conscious culture made complete sense. Keep in mind that Matthew was a Jewish Believer and his Gospel was constructed primarily for reading by other Jewish Believers.

Another interesting feature of Matthew's genealogy was the inclusion of 4 women (something quite rare). But even more, every one of these women began life as gentiles. He could have included more women (including Rachel), since she, too, began life as a gentile, but he didn't. My speculation for why he didn't is that he specifically wanted to arrive at the number 4 due to its meaning in gematria. Four is meant to indicate universal inclusiveness; something that is wide spread if not global. It is derived from the fact that a compass has 4 directions and the belief in that era that the earth was flat, was more or less square, and had 4 corners.

Then there is the interesting matter of when we compare Luke's Gospel genealogy to Matthew's. There has always been a Christian scholarly focus on the exact names and their order of these 2 genealogies, and so various explanations have been formulated to explain some obvious differences between them. Yet those explanations and perceived differences are based on modern Western thinking and not ancient Eastern thinking. There are two glaring differences that seem to get overlooked, which are in line with how the Hebrews thought about things. The first is that while Matthew lists his genealogy in typical Hebrew descending fashion (that is, the genealogy begins with the oldest ancestor and works backwards down to the person whose genealogy is being presented), Luke's is an ascending genealogy that begins with the person of interest, and eventually makes its way up to the oldest ancestor as the final entry. Further, Matthew's genealogy lists Abraham as Yeshua's oldest ancestor, while Luke lists Adam. This actually makes sense. Matthew was Hebrew and Luke almost certainly was not. So for Matthew, the ancestral Father of Yeshua was of course the Father of all Hebrews: Abraham.... not Adam. However for the gentile Luke, his focus was on connecting Yeshua all the way back to the universal Father of all humanity..... gentile and Hebrew..... Adam.

Thus we see how both Matthew and Luke had certain agendas in mind as they each constructed their genealogies of Christ. Theirs was not "spin", nor was it an attempt to distort or deceive. It was simply their personal worldviews, which included how the purpose of genealogies was thought of in their era, and it was part of the message that each Gospel writer was attempting to impart to his readers.

Another important principle that we see woven throughout all the Gospels (and the New Testament in general) was that Messiah was to be seen as the inaugurator of a re-creation of everything; a second genesis. All was to be remade new.

As Matthew begins to tell his story of Jesus' birth, he immediately brings up the issue of Mary becoming pregnant by the Holy Spirit. I want to pause for just a moment to explain something. Often we hear the term "immaculate conception" in regards to this event. In effect this is conflating two entirely different things. The immaculate conception is purely Roman Catholic doctrine that has little to do with the birth of Christ. Rather it is a doctrine held as a core belief that the Virgin Mary was herself conceived by a divine miracle that made her free from sin. So in many respects, the thought is that Mary conceived her son in the same way she was conceived. In Roman Catholicism this allows for elevating Mary beyond normal human status to the semi-divine.

Included in the story of Christ's birth is the matter of Mary and Joseph being betrothed. For Believers living in modern times we need to think of betrothal more as marriage than as an engagement. Even though during this period of betrothal the girl still lived with her father, she was called "wife" upon her betrothal, and called "widow" should her betrothed husband die. The reality is that for Jewish readers of Matthew's Gospel the mention of Yosef and Miryam being betrothed mostly meant that the time for her moving in with him hadn't come yet, and it means that they were not yet permitted to have marital intimacy. Other than for that, they are completely married as we think of it today. In fact for a betrothal to be called off, a **get** (a divorce document) had to be issued by the man because upon the betrothal a marriage contract between the man and the girl's father had been drawn up and executed.

We left off at the point when Joseph was trying to figure out what to do about this shameful dilemma of his betrothed's pregnancy and had decided that he would not publicly denounce her or charge her with a crime that literally could end with

her execution. Rather, he'd merely handle things as quietly and privately as possible, which meant he would end the betrothal by handing Mary's father a divorce document. However as Yosef slept an uneasy sleep, he was visited in a dream by an angel who brought him a message from God that gave him different marching orders.

Open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 1.

READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 1:18 - end

The angel brings an astounding message to Joseph in a dream. I'll admit upfront that perhaps there was no angel involved at all. The reason I say this is because the term angel in the Hebrew concept simply means messenger. The messenger could take any form from the spiritual to the common human. But it also could be a rather fuzzy term that adds a spiritual element to a human thought. We must remember just how God-oriented people were in that era; life was not compartmentalized into the spiritual and the natural. On the other hand there are some Bible commentators who insist that this angel is not only a real angel, but is the Angel of the Lord and not a regular angel. Although most of Protestant Christianity does not accept the concept that the Angel of the Lord is an additional manifestation of God Himself (because it would create a problem with the Trinity Doctrine that God is entirely and only Father, Son and Holy Spirit), in fact that is precisely what the Angel of the Lord is and good Bible scholars acknowledge that reality. I find no evidence of this here in Matthew.

In the Old Testament, in Hebrew, the term for Angel of the Lord is ***Malach Yehoveh*** (Yehoveh NOT meaning Lord, but rather it is God's personal name that He first gave to Moses, better known in Christianity as Jehovah). That term is not used in this verse. However to get around the problem, some commentators say that in verse 21 where Joseph is told what to name this child in Mary's womb, and because the verse concludes with: "because He will save His people from their sins", that in fact the verse should say "because He will save MY people from their sins". Therefore, it has the angel speaking to Joseph describing the people to be saved in a possessive manner: that is, they are the angel's people. So if the angel is claiming the saved people for himself then the angel must be God..... the Angel of the Lord. But that is not what the verse says. The same Greek word, ***autos***, is used twice to end the verse. The first time it means "He" and the second time it means "His"..... not "My". In Greek there are 2 words that can be translated to "my": ***emos*** and ***mou***. Neither are used. So this is a regular

angel, or perhaps it is a divinely inspired thought, that is being communicated to Yosef by means of a dream.

Joseph was still deciding what to do. The angel tells him not to interrupt the marital process but rather to continue on because Mary is innocent. She has conceived a son by means of the Holy Spirit; that is, a divine miracle of God's will has occurred. Joseph's first thought would not have been how that was scientifically impossible (as it is today), but rather what the meaning of such an amazing thing would be. Therefore the messenger tells him what this child will do and that it shall be reflected in the child's name Yeshua, which means God saves. At least that's what most Bibles will say. If ever there were reasons for us to thoroughly understand the meaning of a name it is here as it involves the most famous and earth changing name ever given. So we're going to cut away to a bit of a detour to talk about it.

I want to begin by saying that the name Yeshua was, in Christ's day, actually among the most popular of all male names given; hundreds, probably thousands, of Jewish men were named Yeshua. Part of the reason for that is that Yeshua is really just another way of saying Joshua. I'm going to borrow heavily from David Stern's Commentary on the New Testament because I've not run across another Bible scholar who has done such a wonderful job of research and of making an understandable explanation about Yeshua's name. I'll also add some thoughts of Professor David Flusser and a couple of my own as well.

In Hebrew the name Yeshua is spelled yud-shin-vav-ayin (in the English alphabet we would say Y-S-V-A. It means the same as the Hebrew root word **yoshia**, which means "he will save". However **yoshia** is a statement while Yeshua is a proper name. Yeshua is actually but a common contraction of another Hebrew name **Y'hoshua**; those 2 names mean exactly the same thing because they are essentially exactly the same name. It is not unlike myself with the given name of Thomas, but most often called Tom. Tom is a contraction of Thomas but it means the same thing so the names are virtually interchangeable. Now please hear me: **Y'hoshua** does NOT mean "God saves"; it means "Yehoveh saves". And therefore so does Yeshua NOT mean "God saves" but rather "Yehoveh saves". It makes the author of the saving transaction quite specific and quite personal. But it also says something else that can produce quite a headache among Believers. Even Christ's name says that it is not He who is the author of salvation, but rather it is His Father whose name is Yehoveh.

Do not misunderstand me. I am in no way wavering from the fact that Jesus is the one who died on the cross for our sins, thus atoning for them. Nor do I deny that the Bible calls Him Savior. But Yeshua's name itself does throw the spotlight back upon the Father, Yehoveh, rather than shoving the Father offstage and focusing everything on Jesus as modern Christianity tends to do. Throughout the Gospel accounts we find Christ deflecting attention and glory from Himself and to His Heavenly Father. Listen to how Mary perceived what was going on inside her womb and whom she glorified as her Savior.

^{CJB} Luke 1:41-48 ⁴¹ When Elisheva heard Miryam's greeting, the baby in her womb stirred. Elisheva was filled with the Ruach HaKodesh ⁴² and spoke up in a loud voice, "How blessed are you among women! And how blessed is the child in your womb! ⁴³ "But who am I, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy! ⁴⁵ Indeed you are blessed, because you have trusted that the promise ADONAI has made to you will be fulfilled." ⁴⁶ Then Miryam said, "My soul magnifies ADONAI; ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior, ⁴⁸ who has taken notice of his servant-girl in her humble position. For- imagine it!- from now on, all generations will call me blessed!

Continuing with the name of the child: interestingly, the way that name was pronounced was different in Galilee than it was in Judea. Different dialects had developed between the two Holy Land regions, as well as a goodly number of different traditions. In Galilee His name was pronounced **Yeshu**. That is, Galilean Jews at this time dropped the "a" (ayin) at the end of a word or a name when they pronounced it out loud. Let me include that when they wrote the name the "ayin" would have been retained. So in Galilee the way His name was spoken sounded like **Yeshu**, but in Judea it sounded like **Yeshua**. To make an example for you lets use the word almond (the nut). In most of America the word is pronounced all-mond; but in some parts of America the "L" sound is dropped and it is pronounced ah-mond. But in both areas it would still be spelled with the L included. That is the effect of dialect.

But in older Jewish society (well after the time of the Temple destruction), the use of the name **Yeshu** became derogatory (there were no longer any Judean versus Galilean dialects). Why derogatory? Because there is a Hebrew saying that means "May his name and memory be blotted out." The first letters of each of the Hebrew words used in the saying form an acronym that when spoken sounds

like **Yeshu**. Historically it is used by non-Believing Jews in a mocking way when referring to Yeshua (Jesus). Oddly enough the word **Yeshu** no longer is used universally throughout Jewish society in this same way, with many Jews today rather innocently thinking that **Yeshu** is actually the proper Hebrew name for Christ. Still, I highly advise that when talking with Jews about Christ (and when you are in Israel) you avoid saying **Yeshu** because it can cause some conflict depending on who you're talking to. Stick with Yeshua.

Let me add that there is nothing wrong using the name Jesus; it is the accepted English name for Yeshua. I have heard all kinds of arguments against using the name Jesus including that it is the English translation of the Greek word Zeus. That is simply false. I prefer to use the name Yeshua because a) it was His given name in His native tongue, and b) because English speakers can easily pronounce it. We usually give foreigners the privilege of being called by their given name in their native tongue except when it is so difficult to pronounce that we English-ize it. My opinion is that, for the most part, we ought to give Yeshua's actual birth name that same respect.... because we can. But it is not sinful or pagan if we don't.

I think we've exhausted that subject, so moving on.... if we were to compare Luke 1:31 to Matthew's birth narrative we would find one of a few conflicts among the Gospel accounts. Luke has it that it is Mary who is told the name for her child while in our Matthew study it is Joseph. We needn't make too much out of this. In Hebrew custom the male child was given his name at his circumcision ceremony; and there was no real conflict over which Jewish parent gave the boy his name. Besides, all things considered, it could well be Luke and Matthew aren't in conflict at all; rather perhaps both Yosef and Miryam were told by God what to name the child.

Let's discuss this statement in Joseph's dream that the reason for Yeshua's name is because He is going to save people **from their sins**. I'm not sure exactly how Joseph and others would have taken this. Yeshua was among the most common male names in that era, and among the Jews the term "salvation" still mostly meant deliverance from an earthly oppressor. In fact, the Jews nearly universally believed that the hoped-for Messiah would deliver them (save them) from the oppression of Rome. The more spiritual nature of the term as meaning salvation from **sins** had to do with being healed from sickness. It is to be remembered that there was no understanding of germs or bacteria so there were few explanations for where illnesses came from. Mostly they were seen as

punishments from a god, and in Israel they were seen as divine consequences for disobedience to Yehoveh..... sinning.... meaning to break the Laws of Moses. Sin and sickness were closely tied together among Jews. We find instances within the Gospel accounts of Christ's healing of sickness being perceived by the observers as people being "saved" from their sins.

It is easy for us to look back and understand that it is Messiah's atoning death for our sins, saving us from eternal damnation, that is in view in Joseph's dream; but few Jews in his day would have comprehended it that way.

Verse 22 brings all that Mary and Joseph are experiencing into a Heavenly orientation as opposed to a human orientation. That is, despite the terribly difficult circumstances that the couple are facing, there is a reason for it that goes well beyond their wants and needs. It is because God, through His Prophets, prophesied that the Messiah would come into the world in just this way. And the precise prophecy from 700 years earlier is quoted out of the Book of Isaiah.

^{CJB} ***Isaiah 7:14 Therefore Adonai himself will give you people a sign: the young woman* will become pregnant, bear a son and name him 'Immanu El [God is with us].***

Before we discuss this particular verse as the prophecy that Mary's pregnancy is fulfilling, I want to highlight something that has caused a goodly portion of the institutional Church to veer terribly off course in some ways. Perhaps more than ever the Old Testament is shunned as being irrelevant for Christians. If it has any relevance at all remaining, then it can only be for the Jewish people. The birth of Christ essentially not only closed the book on the Old Testament, it abolished it. None of this is true, and it actually defies Holy Scripture. But when this fundamental doctrinal attitude is taken, it greatly tarnishes and diminishes the Bible's divine authority and so we can easily lose our way.

Verse 22 directly connects the Old Testament to Mary's pregnancy. Yeshua's birth, life, death, and resurrection are foretold in the Old Testament. In the New Testament we have the record of those hundreds of years old prophecies coming to fruition. The Old Testament is as much the foundation for the New as the foundation of a building is laid so that something can be constructed upon it. But once built, can the foundation then be removed? Can you imagine building a house with the first step being to lay the foundation. Then atop it you construct the living quarters, bring in furniture, decorate it, and move in. Once done, do you

call the contractor back and tell him that it is now time to remove the foundation from under the house, because it is no longer needed? Just because the foundation has become buried underneath it all doesn't make it obsolete. Yet, the very prophecies of a Messiah along with where he'll come from, what his nature is, what he'll do, and what his life and death will mean are all contained NOT in the New Testament but rather in the Old. Those Old Testament prophecies are the foundation and to remove it means the house will collapse.

David Stern claims that more than 50 messianic pretenders have come and gone since just before Christ's birth. None of them fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies; only Yeshua has. The latest one is a fellow named Menachem Mendel Schneerson, a Rabbi who passed away in 1994. His followers so revered this man that they declared that he was the Messiah and many still believe he is. It matters not at all to his Orthodox Jewish flock that the Rabbi, a good and decent man, fulfilled none of the Tanakh that they supposedly are learned in. Yet despite the fact that Yeshua of Nazareth did fulfill all the prophecies about a Messiah, these Orthodox along with almost all other Jews refuse to accept Him, and prefer to wait for another.

Now as for Isaiah's prophecy.... notice that the CJB says that the "virgin" will conceive and bear a son. We'll find the word "virgin" used in most English translations. However that is not what is in Isaiah's prophecy. The Hebrew word is **almah** and it means maiden or handmaiden of good reputation. It inherently means a young, unmarried woman who is of child bearing age. In Hebrew society such a woman was supposed to remain in a virgin state; but not all did. So the idea of virginity was indeed in the background of the definition of **almah** however that is not the main point of the word itself. It is meant to convey youthfulness and the marriage eligibility of the woman. The Hebrew word for virgin, where virginity is the point, is **bethulah**.

If we're still being intellectually honest about it, the context for this prophecy in the Book of Isaiah was addressed to King Ahaz; it seems to be about the eventual birth of a Davidic prince that was meant as a sign of hope for the struggling Kingdom of Judah. There is no good evidence that later Judaism took Isaiah's prophecy about the young woman conceiving a child to be a Messianic prophecy nor that it involved a miraculous conception whereby the male seed was actually God's. However, clearly, some among the Jewish people were open to understanding it that way. Nonetheless, the prophecy of a prince coming from David's line to rule over God's people fits right in with the son-of-David focus of

Matthew's genealogy of Jesus and the ancient biblical prophecies that also focused on the Messiah having to come from David's royal line.

It has been proposed by any number of Bible scholars that the concept of a young girl giving birth as a virgin is pagan in its source. Yet when challenged to come up with a parallel in the pagan world, it cannot be found except where a male is somewhere involved in the conception process. Interestingly this same concept is vague among any currently known ancient Jewish sources. So the claim of a true virgin birth actually happening, with the Holy Spirit of God substituting for the male seed, is essentially unknown until the Gospel of Matthew; it is totally unique both in concept and event. For non-Believers this makes the story even less believable if not silly; and for Believers this makes the story all the more believable and wonderful; so you see the dilemma. Just as trust in God and in Christ is a matter of faith, and faith itself is a divine gift and not something conjured up by our own human will or soul, so are the Gospel accounts' insistence that Mary's virgin pregnancy was quite real is a matter of faith in the truth of the Word of God. Naturally to an atheist or agnostic, the story is laughable, largely because it cannot be tested or reproduced in a laboratory. But the Church has also fallen into a trap because more and more Bible commentators and mainstream Pastors feel that all that we read of "miraculous" events in the Bible must have natural explanations if they are to appeal to modern well educated people. Yet to the human mind if a fully natural explanation can be proven, then it is hardly a divine miracle and instead is but ancient myth.

Therefore it is no longer unusual for professing Christians to at once claim to be followers of Jesus, but at the same time dismiss the many miracles surrounding His conception, birth, life, death, and resurrection. At the risk of offending, I warn those who embrace such a dual mindset that you are likely not saved Believers at all, but rather you merely practice a modern philosophy of Jesus that you think He preached. Yet it is a philosophy that has been filtered, sifted, and picked-over to rid it of anything divine, miraculous, or even authoritative in the modern world, and leans more towards whatever is the current political correctness. Thus sincere faith and trust is no longer required; just participation in a group of the like-minded.

Verses 24 and 25 tell us that Yosef not only heard but also acted upon the instructions within his dream. This is the very definition of the Hebrew concept of **shema**.... hearing and obeying.... as opposed to the passive concept of

listening without action. Despite full knowledge by Yosef that this child was not of his seed, he fully accepted Yeshua as his son. In the Mishnah, Bava Batra 8:6 we read: "If one says 'this is my son' he is to be believed". Even more, in the Gemara this concept of sonship is expanded upon and says that this right is to be extended even as it involves inheritance. This is important because since Joseph is in the royal line of David, then Yeshua inherits the right to the throne from his legal, but not biological, father Joseph.

So in the end Joseph did not issue Mary a **get**. Rather, likely somewhat sooner than customary, he hurried to complete the betrothal period by having her move in with him. Yet..... the consummation of the union was postponed. This passage states frankly that they did not have sexual relations until after Mary's divinely conceived child was born.

I want to sum up Matthew chapter 1 in this way: Matthew's purpose was expressly to begin his Gospel by explaining who Yeshua is. He is the Messiah, Son of David, Son of Abraham, brought into this world by an otherwise non-descript, unimportant country girl. His unique conception was a direct work of the God of Israel and none else. Believability and plausibility play no roles because God doesn't bend His will or His ways to suit mankind's expectations. Even Messiah's name is God-ordained because it says what He will do. Through Christ's earthly father, Yosef, Yeshua is legally connected to the throne of David. Through Christ's earthly mother, Miryam, his origin is divine.

We'll take up chapter 2 next time.