



Matthew

VOLUME I: CHAPTERS 1-13



REFORMED

EXPOSITORY

COMMENTARY

DANIEL M. DORIANI

Matthew

VOLUME 1

REFORMED EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY

A Series

Series Editors

Richard D. Phillips
Philip Graham Ryken

Testament Editors

Iain M. Duguid, Old Testament
Daniel M. Doriani, New Testament

Matthew

DANIEL M. DORIANI

VOLUME 1

MATTHEW 1-13



P U B L I S H I N G

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

In every generation there is a fresh need for the faithful exposition of God's Word in the church. At the same time, the church must constantly do the work of theology: reflecting on the teaching of Scripture, confessing its doctrines of the Christian faith, and applying them to contemporary culture. We believe that these two tasks—the expositional and the theological—are interdependent. Our doctrine must derive from the biblical text, and our understanding of any particular passage of Scripture must arise from the doctrine taught in Scripture as a whole.

We further believe that these interdependent tasks of biblical exposition and theological reflection are best undertaken in the church, and most specifically in the pulpits of the church. This is all the more true since the study of Scripture properly results in doxology and praxis—that is, in praise to God and practical application in the lives of believers. In pursuit of these ends, we are pleased to present the Reformed Expository Commentary as a fresh exposition of Scripture for our generation in the church. We hope and pray that pastors, teachers, Bible study leaders, and many others will find this series to be a faithful, inspiring, and useful resource for the study of God's infallible, inerrant Word.

The Reformed Expository Commentary has four fundamental commitments. First, these commentaries aim to be *biblical*, presenting a comprehensive exposition characterized by careful attention to the details of the text. They are not exegetical commentaries—commenting word by word or even verse by verse—but integrated expositions of whole passages of Scripture. Each commentary will thus present a sequential, systematic treatment of an entire book of the Bible, passage by passage. Second, these commentaries are unashamedly *doctrinal*. We are committed

Series Introduction

to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Each volume will teach, promote, and defend the doctrines of the Reformed faith as they are found in the Bible. Third, these commentaries are *redemptive-historical* in their orientation. We believe in the unity of the Bible and its central message of salvation in Christ. We are thus committed to a Christ-centered view of the Old Testament, in which its characters, events, regulations, and institutions are properly understood as pointing us to Christ and his gospel, as well as giving us examples to follow in living by faith. Fourth, these commentaries are *practical*, applying the text of Scripture to contemporary challenges of life—both public and private—with appropriate illustrations.

The contributors to the Reformed Expository Commentary are all pastor-scholars. As pastor, each author will first present his expositions in the pulpit ministry of his church. This means that these commentaries are rooted in the teaching of Scripture to real people in the church. While aiming to be scholarly, these expositions are not academic. Our intent is to be faithful, clear, and helpful to Christians who possess various levels of biblical and theological training—as should be true in any effective pulpit ministry. Inevitably this means that some issues of academic interest will not be covered. Nevertheless, we aim to achieve a responsible level of scholarship, seeking to promote and model this for pastors and other teachers in the church. Significant exegetical and theological difficulties, along with such historical and cultural background as is relevant to the text, will be treated with care.

We strive for a high standard of enduring excellence. This begins with the selection of the authors, all of whom have proven to be outstanding communicators of God's Word. But this pursuit of excellence is also reflected in a disciplined editorial process. Each volume is edited by both a series editor and a testament editor. The testament editors, Iain Duguid for the Old Testament and Daniel Doriani for the New Testament, are accomplished pastors and respected scholars who have taught at the seminary level. Their job is to ensure that each volume is sufficiently conversant with up-to-date scholarship and is faithful and accurate in its exposition of the text. As series editors, we oversee each volume to ensure its overall quality—including excellence of writing, soundness of teaching, and use-

fulness in application. Working together as an editorial team, along with the publisher, we are devoted to ensuring that these are the best commentaries our gifted authors can provide, so that the church will be served with trustworthy and exemplary expositions of God's Word.

It is our goal and prayer that the Reformed Expository Commentary will serve the church by renewing confidence in the clarity and power of Scripture and by upholding the great doctrinal heritage of the Reformed faith. We hope that pastors who read these commentaries will be encouraged in their own expository preaching ministry, which we believe to be the best and most biblical pattern for teaching God's Word in the church. We hope that lay teachers will find these commentaries among the most useful resources they rely upon for understanding and presenting the text of the Bible. And we hope that the devotional quality of these studies of Scripture will instruct and inspire each Christian who reads them in joyful, obedient discipleship to Jesus Christ.

May the Lord bless all who read the Reformed Expository Commentary. We commit these volumes to the Lord Jesus Christ, praying that the Holy Spirit will use them for the instruction and edification of the church, with thanksgiving to God the Father for his unceasing faithfulness in building his church through the ministry of his Word.

Richard D. Phillips
Philip Graham Ryken
Series Editors

PREFACE

This book is the fruit of a long and twofold relationship with Matthew. In my role as a professor, I have taught a course on the Gospels, with Matthew as my primary text, every year since 1987. The academic setting demands that great attention be given to questions of exegetical method and to interpretive options and the reasoning behind them. As a pastor, therefore, I savored my two years of preaching through the entire text of Matthew. There at last, I could present a full exegetical and practical lesson on the many passages that, in the urgency of a semester's limits, necessarily received such brief attention in the classroom.

R. T. France once noted that in early Christianity several factors combined to give Matthew preeminence that it has never entirely lost.¹ First, for many centuries the church believed that Matthew was the first Gospel to be written. To be sure, most contemporary scholars suspect that Mark was written first, but skilled scholars still defend the priority of Matthew, and there is no consensus solution to the question "Which synoptic Gospel was written first?" Second, with its five blocks of teaching on discipleship, Matthew has the most systematic and most accessible pastoral teaching on the Christian life. Third, Matthew makes the most use of the Old Testament, both in explicit quotations and in innumerable allusions, so that it can be the first place Christians turn for guidance on use of the Old Testament. In that capacity, it shows Christians how the old covenant promises are fulfilled in the new and how the law of Moses exercises its authority today. Thus Matthew may yet be the Gospel the church most depends upon, if not for evangelism, then at least for the task of making disciples.

1. R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 18–20.

Preface

It is customary for the introduction to a critical or exegetical commentary to expend great effort on questions of the authorship, date, canonicity, intended audience, reliability, and goals of a book. I leave that task to the capable exegetical commentaries by scholars such as Carson, France, Hagner, Keener, and Morris, whose works I cite within. Still, the reader deserves at least an orientation to my views, which will unfold in coming pages.

So then, I believe that the apostle Matthew, one of the Twelve, a reformed tax collector, did indeed write the Gospel that bears his name. He wrote as an eyewitness, as a member of the apostolic band, and as a man moved by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. John Wenham makes a strong case that Matthew and Luke were written around the same time and that Luke had to be written in the A.D. 50s, since Paul alludes to Luke's Gospel in 2 Corinthians 8:18 and scholars of all stripes concede that 2 Corinthians was written before A.D. 60.² At a minimum, I believe Matthew wrote before the fall of Jerusalem, so that Matthew 24 is a monument of predictive prophecy, not a case of prophecy after the fact. All evidence indicates that the church always accepted the Gospel of Matthew as an authoritative apostolic account of the life of Christ. Everywhere copies of Matthew went, they were immediately received as the word of God, so that we may call it "instant canon."

Matthew wrote his Gospel for the whole church. Yet, given that Matthew has so many Old Testament quotations and allusions, given that he assumes that his readers know both the Old Testament and contemporary Jewish customs (compare Matthew 15:1–9 to Mark 7:1–8), I stand with the scholarly consensus that Matthew's original audience was predominantly Jewish Christian. Whether they had already grasped the lesson or not, Matthew wanted to show his readers and to motivate them to act upon the principle that the Lord had called them to take the gospel to the nations.

It is my bedrock conviction that the Gospel of Matthew is accurate and reliable both theologically and historically. The events he records actually happened, a thesis I defend at some length in the chapter on Matthew 8:1–4. Matthew certainly doesn't tell us everything we want to know—how we ache for more at times!—and he probably wrote down a small fraction of what he knew. As John says in his conclusion, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world

2. John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark, and Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 230–38.

would not have room for the books that would be written” (John 21:25). Surely Matthew could have said much the same thing. So the Gospel of Matthew doesn’t scratch every itch of curiosity, but it does tell us what we need to know to come to faith and to live for Jesus, Lord and Christ, son of Abraham and of David, the God-man who gave his life as a ransom for many by dying on the cross and rising that first Easter Sunday.

Matthew carefully structured his Gospel. After introducing us to Jesus and establishing the full context for his ministry in chapters 1–3, Matthew presents historical accounts of Jesus’ miracles and his encounters with men and women and intersperses them with blocks of Jesus’ teaching. As we will see, he places each block precisely where it needs to be in order to advance his account of the life of Jesus and his description of the life of a disciple. So, for example, after Matthew describes the call of Jesus’ first disciples in chapter 4, we come at once to the description of the mind and conduct of a disciple in chapters 5–7. Again, after Matthew describes the extent of the opposition to Jesus and his work in chapters 11–12, he describes the growth of the kingdom in chapter 13. Of course, his narrative builds to its climax in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, followed by the call to go and make disciples of the nations, in chapters 26–28.

Happily, ordinary Christians tend to love the Gospel of Matthew, which is so full of the words and deeds of Christ. None of the Gospels is a simple book, but like the others, Matthew is fairly straightforward. Thus the careful reader will gain new insight even on the fortieth reading, and the honest beginner will not fail to grasp the heart of the matter the very first time. May the Lord grant you, beloved reader, a delight in your exploration of its clear and profound message, however often you have read Matthew’s sacred pages.

Finally, a preface must at least hint at the many hands and minds that made the work possible. If only to suggest the many debts I owe, I single out a few who helped most. I mention Mark Futato, my first teammate in the enterprise of serious exegesis, and Robert Yarbrough, who helped me think through so many issues in the study of the Gospels. I thank my editors, Iain Duguid for pointing out links between Matthew and the Old Testament, and Phil Ryken, whose meticulous review of every line improved the clarity and precision of this work at so many points. I thank Robbie Griggs for thorough and cheerful research assistance in yet another project. Jo Durham’s patient and sophisticated assistance allows me to be a writing

Preface

pastor. Robbie and Jo are but two representatives of the pastors, staff, and faithful congregation, my many friends in Central Presbyterian Church, who both encouraged this series of messages and facilitated the writing of this book. Above all, I thank my beloved Debbie who ensures both that our life holds together and that it has enough unfilled spaces that we can savor the blessings. I dedicate this book to my daughter Sarah and to her husband Branden whose romance, wedding, and marriage filled the latter stages of this project with both excitement and joy.

 *Matthew*

MAKING DISCIPLES FOR THE NATIONS

1

THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

Matthew 1:1–17

*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David,
the son of Abraham: (Matt. 1:1)*



To make sense of events, we need to know who the characters are. This is true of the birth of Jesus, but it is true almost any time that something striking happens. One Saturday I headed off for a tennis match against the best team in the league, on their court. Still, competitors always hope for an upset. My hopes surged as I began to warm up with one of our opponents. He was a big, hard-hitting lefty, but he looked erratic and slow-footed. Much hinged on his partner, who had not yet showed up. The minutes ticked away. The time for a forfeit was approaching, when Lefty asked a club pro to find someone to fill in. The pro returned with a slender man named Altof, who moved like a cat and held his racket in a faintly menacing way.

I began to hit with Altof. In league play, men warm up watchfully, trying to judge their opponent's skills and deficiencies. Watching Altof, I saw all skill and no deficiency. His strokes were effortless, his footwork flawless, and every ball he struck came in deep and hard.

Before the match, I told my partner, “We need to hit to your man; mine looks *very* solid.” So we hit to Lefty and it worked well enough that the score was tied 4–4 after eight games. Then, suddenly Altof was everywhere, crushing the ball for winner after winner, and we lost the first set 6–4. Before the second set began, I overheard Altof whispering to Lefty, “I need to finish this soon.” I told my partner, “If we lose the second set in fifteen minutes, we’ll know something is up.” Indeed, we lost 6–1 in fifteen minutes, with Altof covering the entire court, punishing us in point after point. As we shook hands at the net, I said, “That was good. Now tell me who you are.”

“Well,” he confessed, “I’m a pro here, just filling in so you could have a match.”

“Oh, I figured that out a while ago,” I smiled. “I want to know *Who Are You?!*”

“OK,” he said, “I’ll tell you. I was a touring pro till a year ago; I played for India’s Davis Cup team.” To translate, of India’s one billion residents, Altof was in the top five. Out of every ten million people, less than one is better than Altof. Now I understood our match.

Matthew 1 follows the same principle: You have to know who the characters are to make sense of the events. And Matthew 1 describes some very unusual events. There is a virgin who is pregnant by the agency of the Holy Spirit. An angel appears to prevent a young man from setting aside an unwed mother. Then the angel picks the name of that child and declares that he will be the Savior.

It’s a strange, incomprehensible story—unless you know the characters. So, who is this child? It’s a good question; people ask it more than once in the Gospels:

- A storm threatens to swamp a boat, drowning everyone on board. Jesus stands up, rebukes the wind and the waves, and they stop at once. His disciples see it and ask, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” (Matt. 8:27 // Mark 4:41).
- He forgives sins and the bystanders ask, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” (Luke 7:49).
- He enters Jerusalem attended by a crowd that lays cloaks and palm branches on the road before him. They call out, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” and the city asks, “Who is this?” (Matt. 21:10).

- At his trial, the high priest of the Jews asks, “Are you the Christ?” The Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, asks, “Are you the king of the Jews?” (Matt. 26:63; 27:11).

The whole Gospel asks and the whole Gospel tells who this is, starting in chapter 1. This child’s name is *Jesus*, for he will save his people from their sins (1:1, 21). He is the Christ, the one anointed by God for a given task (1:1, 18). He is the *Son of David*—born the king of the Jews (1:1; 2:2). He is the *son of Abraham*—he will bring blessing to the nations (1:1). He is born of the Holy Spirit (1:18). He is *Immanuel*—God with us (1:23).

Jesus received names such as *Jesus* and *Immanuel* not because they were fashionable or manly, but because they were fraught with significance. Each name reveals part of Jesus’ identity. The question “Who is this?” leads next to the question “Why is he important?” The answer leads through the hopes and fears of two thousand years of Israel’s history.

Matthew tells us who Jesus is. Yet his nature is never separated from his work, for he is the Savior for the nations. Matthew 1:1 introduces us to the hero by stating his name and his origin. He is Jesus the Savior, Christ the anointed, the son of Abraham, hence of both pagan and Jewish lineage, and he is the Son of David, the great king.

JESUS, THE SAVIOR

As Matthew introduces Jesus, he quickly reveals several names and titles. Jesus is son of Abraham and Son of David (1:1), therefore, the king of the Jews (2:2, 6). He is the Christ (1:1 and 2:4). First and best, he is Jesus, God with us, to save (1:1, 21–23). Jesus is a Hebrew name. In the Hebrew it is Joshua; in Greek, that becomes Jesus. Joshua means “the LORD [Yahweh] saves” or “The LORD is salvation.” The name Joshua reminds us of the Joshua who succeeded Moses and led Israel into the Promised Land. In his day, the Lord saved his people physically and materially by giving them their land and ending their years of wilderness wandering.

Jesus does not save that way. He did not save Israel from military enemies or from physical danger. Jesus did save some people from physical illness and danger (8:25–26; 9:21–22). But such deliverance pointed beyond itself, to God’s eternal restoration of all things. Psalm 130:7–8 says,

The Birth of Jesus Christ

O Israel, put your hope in the LORD,
for with the LORD is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.
He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.

In the long run, God cares about salvation from enemies, disease, and death, but that part of his program lies in the future, when Jesus returns.

By his incarnation, Jesus began to address the problem that lies at the root of all pains and sorrows. He came to save his people from their *sins*. We see this already in the genealogy. Jesus descended from the line of Jewish kings. Matthew names fifteen of them, from David to Jeconiah (also known as Jehoiachin). So Jesus came from a noble line, but if we look hard we see that this regal group was not so righteous. About half of the kings were men of faith. Several, including David, Hezekiah, and Josiah, were great men. Still, even among the believers, some committed striking sins. Jehoshaphat entered into alliances with wicked men (2 Chron. 20:35–37). In foolish pride, Hezekiah showed the treasures of Israel to her powerful enemies, who later plundered them (2 Kings 20:12–18). After years of successful rule, Uzziah became proud and dared to usurp the role of a priest. He entered the Lord’s temple to burn incense on the altar (2 Chron. 26:1–21).

About half the kings in the genealogy were truly wicked. For example, Ahaz worshiped the pagan gods of Assyria. He practiced human sacrifice. He killed one of his own sons. He stripped the gold and silver from the temple and gave it to other kings. He defiled the Lord’s altar and installed pagan altars instead (2 Kings 16). Nor was Ahaz alone. Rehoboam and Jeconiah were almost as bad and Manasseh was worse. Indeed, Manasseh “did more evil than the nations” that the Lord drove out of Canaan. He promoted the worship of idols and murdered innocent people (2 Kings 21:9–18).

So Jesus’ genealogy includes great kings and sordid sinners. Regal as his lineage was, Jesus did not come to praise his forebears, but to save them. If you doubt this, look at the four women who appear in the genealogy. People often wonder why we find women inserted apparently at random in the genealogy. The answer is clear if we notice that common threads appear in the foursome whose mention is interwoven with that of kings: “Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose

mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife" (Matt. 1:5–6). Three women are listed here; the fourth is barely mentioned in 1:3. They are:

- Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah, who was the son of Jacob; she played the role of a prostitute (Gen. 37).
- Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho, who helped Israel's spies (Josh. 2, 6).
- Ruth, the Moabite who was adopted into the family of Boaz (Ruth 1–4).
- Bathsheba, the paramour of David and the wife of a Hittite (2 Sam. 11–12).

Within this quartet, all but Tamar came from foreign lands or families. They were outside the family of God. Moreover, of the four, three were known prostitutes or adulteresses. Looking at Jesus' genealogy, it is quite clear. He comes from the *human* line, pimples and all. His own people, his own family, needed him to save them from their *sins*.

The last part of Jesus' genealogy shows that Israel was suffering the consequences of its sin (1:11–16). The borders of Israel had failed to hold. The Assyrians dethroned Israel's king and Babylon conquered Judah, deported its leaders, and declared the pitiful remnant to be their vassals.

Jesus' family lost their rank as kings, lost their wealth and land, and nearly lost their identity. We could compare the family of Jesus to the last derelict scion of a once-great family. They were Roosevelts, Lincolns, or Jeffersons, but had fallen far over the years. In any shattered clan, some are drunks, gamblers, or wastrels; others are decent folk, perhaps, but lacking in any great skill or asset. Those are the people Jesus came to save, then and now. We too have low-lives in our family and we have done things that fit a low-life-laden family.

CHRIST, THE ANOINTED ONE

Jesus is a given name. "Christ" eventually became Jesus' second name in Christian usage, but originally it was a title for the Messiah. As a title, it

The Birth of Jesus Christ

simply means “anointed one.” To be anointed is to be set apart and empowered by God for a task he appoints. In Israel, priests and kings were always anointed; prophets were also anointed from time to time (for anointed priests see Ex. 28–30, for anointed kings 1 Sam. 9 and 16).

In Jesus’ day, “Christ” came to signify a specific king, one anointed with God’s strength to deliver the people. The people thought of the Christ as a king because they hoped for a military victory and release from Rome. One book from the time said it this way:

See, Lord, and raise up for them their king,
The son of David, to rule over your servant Israel
In the time known to you, O God.
Undergird him with the strength to destroy the unrighteous rulers,
To purge Jerusalem from Gentiles
Who trample her to destruction. (Psalms of Solomon 17:21–22)

Matthew’s Gospel gradually reveals that Jesus was anointed for a far greater victory than that, a victory he accomplished by taking all three of the main leadership offices of Israel. He is the king, anointed to defeat our greatest foes—sin and death. He is the priest, anointed to offer a sacrifice to remove the guilt of sin. He is the prophet, anointed to tell the truth about humanity and himself. The greatest truth is that he defeated sin for us because we cannot defeat sin. He offered himself to remove our guilt because we cannot atone or compensate for our sin.

But Jesus is not just anointed to fulfill the three main offices in Israel. He fulfills other tasks, as Matthew will show us. He fulfills the role of the Sabbath, by giving true rest to his people. He fulfills the role of the temple, for in him God and mankind meet. He judges mankind, knowing every thought and deed, and forgiving every misdeed if we ask for mercy, believing he can grant it.

The title “Christ” signifies a man who is anointed with oil to consecrate him for a special office. He is commissioned by God for a special task. It is vital that we let God define what that task is. In Jesus’ day, most Israelites believed God’s Messiah would free them from Roman domination and, somehow, triumph over unrighteousness and purify the nation.

We now know that these hopes were partly right and partly wrong. Jesus did triumph over sin and purify the nation, but he did not liberate Israel

from Rome. And when Jesus failed to deliver them the way they expected, some adjusted their expectations, but many others concluded that he must not be the Messiah.

The problem of misguided expectations is common to mankind. We regularly trust the wrong people or expect them to provide what they cannot or should not give. Some Americans expect our superior armed forces to keep us perfectly safe. Some expect their skills to make them prosperous and secure. Jesus says the wise man builds his house upon the rock—not “a” rock, but “the” rock, that is, Jesus, the Christ (Matt. 7:24).

Still, even those who try to build on the rock can suffer disappointment, if they remake Jesus in their image. How so? They may expect Jesus to make their life easy. They may think they can know Jesus as Savior but not as Lord, but we must let him define himself. He is both Savior and Lord.

THE SON OF DAVID, THE HOPE OF ISRAEL

On the side of his father Joseph, Jesus descended, by human accounting, from the royal line of David. He was the offspring of the kingly line. He was the heir of all Israel’s godly kings: Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, and the rest. He was the king of the Jews.

But Jesus is not just any king. He is the Son of David (1:1). “Son of David” seems to organize the entire genealogy. There are fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen more from the rise of David to the end of his dynasty, when Israel went into exile, and fourteen more until the Christ, the Son of David, was born (1:17).

There was a strong hope, in Jesus’ day, for a king who would restore Israel to its former glory and liberate it from Roman oppression and degradation. Israel based this hope on a promise the Lord gave David: he would one day have an heir, a son who would bring a golden age of strength and blessing: “When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. . . . My love will never be taken away from him” (2 Sam. 7:12–15). This anointed king, this Son of David and Son of God, would subdue the kings of the earth and rule them with an iron scepter (Ps. 2:2–9).

The Birth of Jesus Christ

Jesus is called “Son of David” nine times in Matthew and that underlines two points. First, he is the long-promised heir of David (1:1, 20). Through him Israel hoped for restoration. He is mighty to defeat the powers of Satan (12:23) and perhaps the powers of Rome (22:42).

Second, the people expected the king to heal the land, when he removed the Romans and other pagans who defiled it. They also expected healing for the people, one by one. They believed, to use J. R. R. Tolkien’s words, “The hands of the king are the hands of a healer.”¹ So the people asked Jesus for mercy and for healing. Early in his ministry, in Galilee, two blind men followed Jesus and called out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” (9:27). Even when Jesus traveled to neighboring regions, the people expected him to heal. Once a Canaanite woman approached him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession” (15:22). Again, just before Jesus entered Jerusalem, “two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!’ The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!’” (20:30–31).

There is a pattern in these encounters. First, the outsiders of Jewish society and the occasional Gentile “appeal to Jesus as Son of David and are thereby healed.” Second, the crowds “generally respond to these healings with doubt.” For example, when Jesus cast demons out of a man who was blind and mute, so he could talk and see, the people asked, “Could this be the Son of David?” (12:23). Third, “the religious authorities respond with anger (21:15) and blasphemy (12:22–32).”²

In his last week of ministry, Jesus healed many in the temple precincts. He saw twisted, broken limbs and he mended them with a word. Instantly, muscles strengthened and sinews tightened. Eyes bleared and broken with disease and injury could see again. The children (of small account in that day), seeing that the lame walked and the blind saw, began to shout praise to the healer: “Hosanna to the Son of David!” But the chief priests and

1. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, part 3, *The Return of the King* (New York: Ballantine, 1955), 150.

2. D. R. Bauer, “Son of David,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992).

scribes became indignant and asked, “Do you hear what these children are saying?” That is to say, “Tell them to stop.” Jesus replied that he did hear and saw God’s purpose in it, for Psalm 8 says, “From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise” (Matt. 21:14–16).

The Son of David offers his strength to the weak and wounded. He offers hope to the yearning heart, because the mighty king, the Son of David, is a tender healer. To this day, “Son of David” is a title of healing strength. In God’s economy, the strength of Jesus appeals especially to the weak—to the no-accounts. I once had a conversation with someone who hoped to tell a friend about Christ. She commented, “But she has everything, so it’s difficult for her to see that she needs Jesus.”

There are different kinds of strength and there is more than one way to “have everything.” Still, if anyone thinks she has no needs at all, if anyone thinks he has all the strength he needs, then the Son of David will not be very appealing. But if this offer sounds appealing—“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28 ESV)—then the strong Son of David is for you.

THE SON OF ABRAHAM, SAVIOR FOR THE NATIONS

The last title for Jesus in Matthew 1:1 is the son of Abraham. The genealogy in Matthew starts with Abraham, the father of Israel. By contrast, the genealogy in Luke starts with Adam, the father of mankind. Yet the point is not that Jesus is only for the Jews, but that Jesus is for all the children of Abraham.

The common explanation of the difference between the genealogies runs this way: Luke starts with Adam to show that the Savior is descended from the first man. Luke wants to write a Gospel for Gentiles, so he says Jesus is from mankind and for all mankind. People say Matthew is the Gospel for the Jews, so he starts with Abraham, the father of the Jews. Every Israelite called himself a son of Abraham, but especially those who sought to live by faith and walk with God (Matt. 3:9; Luke 1:73; 19:9; John 8:39–53; Acts 7:2; Rom. 4:1, 12). Yet Matthew expects us to know that Abraham was a pagan, a Gentile, before God called him. He was the father of the covenant people, but he was born outside the covenant and stayed there until God brought him in.

The Birth of Jesus Christ

Abraham began life as a pagan. God chose him in order to establish his people, Israel. But from the beginning, God swore he would give Abraham back to the nations. God's first and greatest promise to Abraham says, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:2–3).

God also promised Abraham that through his offspring "all nations on earth will be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). The Gospel of Matthew ends with this very idea: Jesus will bless the nations. He commands the apostles to make disciples of "all nations" (28:19).

Matthew starts to make this point already in the genealogy, in the first lines of his Gospel. As it traces Jesus' forebears, there is a twist. Matthew's genealogy seems to be patriarchal—he mentions the fathers but not the mothers of Jesus' forebears. But as we saw, there are exceptions. Matthew mentions four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, who is called "the wife of Uriah."

Three of the four women are not Israelites. Rahab was a Canaanite, from Jericho. Ruth was a Moabite. Bathsheba married a Hittite, and probably was a Hittite herself. So Jesus has *Gentiles* in the family line! If Matthew is the Gospel for the Jews, it is for a certain kind of Jew, the Jewish believer who hopes all the nations will taste God's blessings.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLES

Many Christians share a Jewish heritage (I do), but most American Christians are Gentiles. Most of us are the descendants of pagans, not Israelites. Centuries ago, our ancestors worshiped Zeus or Thor or their ancestors. We were outside the covenant—strangers and aliens to God. The promise to Abraham "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" was our sole hope. We are sons of Abraham, sons and daughters of the covenant through the grace of God that reaches out to the lost.

A funny thing happens to churchgoers in America. It begins to seem obvious to us that we are Christians. It seems like our birthright. In a way, if our parents are Christians, it *is* our birthright. But from another perspective, most of us need to remember that we are Gentiles, not Israelites—

outsiders, not insiders. The God of Israel is our God, even though we are German, English, French, Dutch, African, Irish, and Russian. Therefore we should still marvel at this grace. If we marvel, if we give thanks that *we* are included in the family of God, then we will include others and give thanks for their presence as well.

At some point, most of us have tasted the angst of waiting to hear if we gained entry into a desirable but exclusive group. It might have been a tree house club for ten-year-olds, a basketball team, a student government, an elite college. After people enter an exclusive club, they can turn one of two ways. They can think, “What a great club—and they let a marginal character like me in. I need to welcome all the other marginal characters, all the folks who wonder if they will be accepted, so they can get all the benefits I have.” Or they can think, “If I got in, the standards must be slipping. I must ensure that our standards stay high, so this club stays exclusive.”

We ought to take the first approach. What a joy to enter the family of God. Let us hold the blessing with humbly grateful hearts and pray, “Thank you, Lord, for making me a child of Abraham. Thank you for including me in your family. Help me remember that your family is always open and help me welcome all people, those who seem worthy and those who seem unworthy, into it. For I know that I am not worthy, but I am beloved. Let me share that love with others.”

The Lord’s titles both tell us who Jesus is and suggest the proper responses to him. He is Jesus, the Savior. Therefore let us receive his salvation. He is the Christ, the one anointed to restore his people. Let us turn to him to restore us when we falter. He is the Son of David, the mighty yet tender healer. Therefore turn to him for healing. He is the son of Abraham, the father of all the faithful, sent to fulfill the hopes of Jews and Gentiles alike. Therefore, let us welcome all to the family of God.