

Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Matthew Chapter One, The Great Story – Week 48

Yearning and its fulfillment

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After the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, Abiud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

Jeconiah was king of Judah when he and the leadership of the small country were exiled to Babylon. In the book of the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 30, Jeremiah writes a letter to the exiles predicting that they shall be in Babylon for 70 years – and indeed, they were. Earlier, in chapter 23, Jeremiah had predicted the downfall of Judah to the Babylonians, but re-asserted that God was still planning to redeem His people through the lineage of David. As a side note, the book of Esther is an intriguing story set during the time of the Babylonian exile.

Shealtiel became governor of Judah under the Babylonians, and Zerubbabel oversaw the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the 2nd temple. The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and the prophet Haggai all concern the return of the country's leadership and the rebuilding. Though the exile to Babylon is a huge imprint on the memory of the Israelites, unlike the original Egyptian exile this one did not involve the entire nation, but rather its leadership – according to Jeremiah 52:28-30, 4600 people were exiled (according to 2nd Kings 24:10-17, the number was quite a bit more – regardless, the majority of the people were left in place to work the land).

It is interesting to note Haggai 1:3-4: **“The Lord’s message came through the prophet Haggai as follows: “Is it right for you to live in richly paneled houses while my temple is in ruins?”** Haggai complains that the people are neglecting the work of the Lord in favour of their own sustenance and comfort. Bishop Graham Tomlin wrote, *“Why would you need a saviour if you don’t need saving? Would you even be able to recognise one when they came along? No amount of brilliant argument can convince the self-satisfied...”*

(<https://www.seenandunseen.com/difference-between-richard-dawkins-and-ayaan-hirsi-ali>)

Focusing on God vs focusing on ourselves seems to be an issue ever since the time of Adam and Eve, even upon a supposedly triumphant return from exile.

Why would the Israelites find it so tempting to focus on their own welfare rather than sacrifice some of their comfort, energy, and wealth to God? To their neighbour? Do we live under similar temptations? Are we self-satisfied? Why is it important to put our neighbours and God as a focus of our energy and capabilities, even to the sacrifice of our own comfort or desires? Does the world teach for this or against this?

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 330: Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Zadok, Achim, Eliud, Eleazar, Matthan, Jacob

We don't know much about any of these people either – in fact, for some of them the only mention they get in our present bible is here. This tells us that either Matthew made them up (unlikely but possible) or that he had a source which has been lost (more likely). What is for certain is that Matthew tries to build an explicit linkage between the family Jesus was born into (Mary and Joseph) and King David's family, from whom the Messiah was to come.

Last week we talked about ordinary people doing ordinary things, and God working through them. Here, God is apparently working through people who have been otherwise forgotten. Of 8 billion people on earth today, how many do you think will be remembered 100 years from now? 1000 years? Reflect on the fact that though people may forget you, God never will – in fact, through Christ you shall live with God forever. Is it comforting or important to know that you and your life have meaning and importance in the household of God, regardless of how well known you may be amongst humans?

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 331: Joseph, the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ

We really don't know much about Joseph other than he was a carpenter, that he married Mary despite suspicious circumstances around the conception of their first-born, and that he is not mentioned as being alive when Jesus has his gospel ministry. We know a bit more about Mary, but even of her we are lacking many historical details. Who exactly were these people, and why did God choose them? Presumably there were other descendants of King David around – why didn't God choose one of them?

Sometimes we don't know why specific people are chosen for a role – but we do know that everyone is chosen to be part of God's kingdom (whether they accept or not is a different matter). God often seems to choose not based on people's perceptions or preferences (strongest, smartest, bravest, most handsome, etc.), but, as was quoted when young David was chosen over his six older brothers, **“God does not view things the way people do. People look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”** Where is your heart? What has God chosen you for?

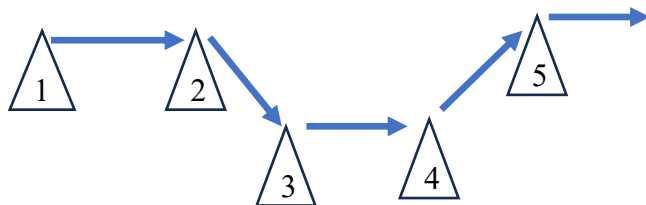
Share with your fellow explorers.

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to Christ, fourteen generations.

There have been several theories put forward regarding why Matthew was fixated on three sets of 14 generations, and the truth is we don't really understand why. However, it is obvious that Matthew saw a balance, a synchronicity, from Abraham to David (apparent highpoint of Israel), from David to Babylon (low point), and from Babylon to Christ (recovery). Every single story has the following plotline, at least in part (stories start in different places, so a story may focus on a very small part of the plotline, for example horrors may go from 1 to 2, tragedies from 1 to 3, comedies from 3 to 4, and "feel good" stories may go from 3 to 5):

1. Everything is wonderful
2. A crisis occurs
3. Everything is terrible
4. A breakthrough occurs
5. Everything becomes wonderful again.

This can be graphed as:



The biblical story, the story arc of creation which Matthew would have accepted in his worldview, broadly ran like this:

1. Everything is wonderful – God has created His temple, and humanity is His image in that temple. This is the first three chapters of the bible.
2. A crisis occurs – humanity rejects its role and tries to assume the full role of God.
3. Everything becomes terrible – humanity is kicked out of the temple and must make it on its' own. God works with humanity (starting with Abraham), tries to call it back to living its original role, but there are repeated misadventures. Humanity is lost and unable to recover on its own. Steps 2 and 3 are the rest of bible until Matthew.
4. A breakthrough occurs – God sends His promised anointed one to lead humanity back.
5. Everything becomes wonderful again – God succeeds so humanity and God can walk together again in full fellowship.

The genealogy which Matthew has described lays out step 3 in a broad overstroke. It describes how God worked with the people Israel until they finally had a homeland and were prosperous, which they then effectively threw away, the continued ramifications of their decisions, and how God continued to work with the people until the stage is now set for the new beginning, the royal

reset, the introduction of the finale to the grand concert, to which everything to date is, effectively, the prologue (you may want to revisit Week 15 for a little more discussion on the great Story Arc of Creation). The long-awaited Messiah has finally come; step 4 is now to be revealed. What the Israelites had been yearning for since the time of David would now get fulfilled. What humanity had been unknowingly yearning for since the time of Adam would now get addressed.

Like any good story, the Great Story is full of conflict and tension which needs resolution for it to be satisfactorily concluded. In the story that you are living in your life, where are you along the story line (1,2,3,4, or 5)? How are you involving God in your story?

Share your thoughts with your fellow disciples.

Day 333: The birth of Salvation, the one anointed to put in place the eternal Kingdom of Israel and bless all humanity

Now the birth of Jesus Christ happened this way. While his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they came together (in marital union), she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

Say what?

What do you mean, "Say what?"

Don't you find that a little shocking, or at least mystifying? "Pregnant through the Holy Spirit?"

Why?

Oh dear. Matthew's just made this assertion as if you know exactly who the Holy Spirit is, how the Holy Spirit can work, and you don't find that a bit puzzling to say the least?

Maybe because I've heard this story since childhood? Not that I necessarily believe it's factual in our sense, but ...

I think Matthew is believing it is factual. But the way he's written this gives you a very important clue as to who his audience is:

Those who know the Holy Spirit?

Yes – by extension, those who know God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This isn't a document intended to convert you – it's a document intended to encourage, uphold, and teach the already converted. That's a very important thing to understand.

Why?

Because Matthew's intended audience *already knew* the Messiah – they had met Him, one way or another. Matthew is intending to reinforce and strengthen their relationship with the Messiah by telling them about Him and His ministry. Matthew's book isn't intended to convert people – it is to reinforce the already-converted. The conversion is to have happened through their life-experiences with other followers of Christ. These people knew how shocking some of what Matthew was asserting here was, but they had already gotten over their shock. If we approach it without understanding that shock, we miss a lot of the impact, a lot of the truth being generated. We can end up dismissing it as unimportant, or worse: a lie.

Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one to lead us into the Kingdom of God? Why or why not? Describe how believing this can hugely impact what you get out of this book.

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 334: Joseph

Read Matthew 1:18-25. Joseph and Mary were at the stage of marriage where they had been bonded to each other, but Mary would not move in with Joseph until he had a room ready for them – so they were married, but the marriage would not be consummated until that time. We are told that Joseph intended to divorce Mary when he found out she was pregnant. Why would he intend that?

Because Mary had been fooling around?

Exactly. Joseph, like you and I, knew that the only way for a woman to get pregnant was through another man. So, Joseph resolved that Mary had been unfaithful, and therefore he needed to divorce her. However, he seems to be a kind man – despite all the shock and emotions he undoubtedly felt, he decided to do this privately, quietly, rather than creating a public spectacle. It would have been very hard to keep this a secret from his family and village, but Joseph apparently wanted to keep any kind of shame from Mary.

And then Joseph gets a further shock.

His dream?

Yes. Through a dream, God tells him, “Joseph – this child is mine. Complete your marriage to Mary and support both of them.” And when he woke from his dream, Joseph did what God told him to – married Mary and named the son “Jesus.”

Being open to the Spirit of God means to be open to God at work in the world around us. Joseph was open to God’s guidance, overturning his prior decision and totally changing his understanding of what had happened with Mary. With the understanding that God is everywhere, how can you be more open to God at work in your life?

Share your thoughts with your fellow Explorers in Christ.

Day 335: Rest

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. Worship! In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God.