

Waiting Does End: God Keeps His Promises

Matthew 1

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 1. Matthew 1 is a story about a long wait that ended. God's people were waiting for God to send the Christ. They waited a long time, and after hundreds of years, God did that very thing. He sent the Christ, and that waiting was over.

My brothers and sisters, the biblical story has a lot of waiting. We are waiting again. The Apostle Paul described the church at Thessalonica this way: *you turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for his Son, Jesus who rescues us from the coming wrath.* We turned from idols to do two things: to serve, and to wait. To serve God, and to wait for his Son Jesus.

During Advent we remind ourselves that they waited a long time, and then God sent the Christ, and now we are waiting another long time, and then God will send the Christ a second time, and from then on we will be with the Lord Jesus forever.

Waiting ended the first time, because God kept his promise; and waiting will end again, because it's the same God. If God sent Christ the first time, he'll send him again.

Now to Matthew 1. Matthew 1 divides naturally into two parts, first the genealogy of Jesus, and second the birth of Jesus. We'll look at both. We'll not read the whole genealogy.

Mt 1:1 Essentials of the genealogy: *This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

Verse 1 is like the genealogy's title. This genealogy covers 42 generations, but there are three important people: Jesus, David, and Abraham. Once we know that Abraham produced David, and David produced Jesus, we have the high points of the genealogy. We get that up front.

Mt 1:11-12 Another Essential: the Exile to Babylon¹¹ *Josiah was the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the exile to Babylon.*¹² *After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and so on.*

Many important things happened to Israel between Abraham and the birth of Jesus: Moving to Egypt, the exodus to the promised land, the covenant at Sinai, and so on. Matthew only mentions one of them: the exile to Babylon.

Mt 1:16-17 Summary of the Genealogy *Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.*

¹⁷ *Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to Babylon to the Messiah.*

So this genealogy has four essential points: Abraham, David, the exile to Babylon, and Jesus. The exile to Babylon is mentioned four times, v11, v12, v17 2x. “exile to Babylon” every time. The exile to Babylon was a painful story for Jews. Why put that in a genealogy? It was horrible, many were killed, they had to leave home, their beloved temple was destroyed, totally humiliating, and all because God was fed up with them.

Many of the exiles came back a few generations later, at Ezra’s time, but Matthew makes no mention of that. The way Matthew writes the genealogy, the Jews are still exiles in Babylon, Jews in Babylon, waiting for the Messiah. Matthew writes as if they are still there, waiting.

A part of the reason is that even though the Jews came back to the promised land at the time of Zerubbabel and Ezra, and they were still under foreign powers. They were ruled by the Medes and Persians for 200 years, then the Greeks for 300 years, and after that the Romans, during which time Jesus was born. They never escaped foreign rulers, foreign soldiers, and heavy taxes.

As far as Matthew is concerned, the Jews for all intents and purposes might as well still be exiles in Babylon. Their situation is still about that bad.

We are supposed to see three parts in this genealogy. 1:17 *Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to Babylon to the Messiah.* Promise, failure, waiting.

From Abraham to David was the time of **promise**. God gave Abraham promises about how he would make a great nation of him, which he kept. Israel was greater in the time of David than at any time. David’s kingship with the political and spiritual high point of Israel’s history.

Abraham to David is the time of promise. From David to the exile to Babylon is a time of **failure**. The kings got worse, and the nation got worse. There were good and bad kings right through, but the trend of the kings and the nation as well was away from God. They failed to be faithful to God, and failed in every way, thus exile to Babylon.

And from the exile to Babylon until Jesus’ birth was a time of **waiting**. Waiting for the Messiah, waiting for the Christ, waiting for God’s rescuer. Miserable waiting, because of foreign rulers, and they feared God was still angry at them for their failure to be faithful to him. But there were many that trusted God, and had not given up. God would send his promised Messiah.

Promise, Failure, Waiting: this is actually a good summary of the OT story. Promise starts with Abraham, Failure starts with David, and Waiting began at the exile. That’s Matthew genealogy.

And then, against all the odds, it actually happened! The Messiah was born! God sent the Messiah, the Christ! God was still with them, God had not forgotten them, or his old promises. Waiting does end, my brothers and sisters, because God keeps his old, old promises.

What kind of Messiah would we expect, after a genealogy like that? We'd expect a Messiah who would lead his people out of exile to Babylon, that's what Matthew seems to think. Matthew seems to think that Jesus was offering something to the Jews that they missed because they rejected him. In any case, God did send them the Messiah he promised.

Detour on Parenting Now I am going to take a 5-10 minute detour, and talk about something else, and then we'll come back to the birth story. I want to clear something up.

Train up a child in the way it should go, and when it is old it will not leave it. Prov 22:6. The failure of David's line of kings should make us think about that verse.

We need to change how we see that verse. We use this as a sort of contract from God, if the parents train the child to serve God, God assures us that the child will serve God all its life. If the child does not, we wonder about the parents. The Bible makes clear to us that this is a wrong understanding.

Matthew 1:9-11 - *Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,* ¹⁰ *Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah,* ¹¹ *and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.*

Uzziah and Jotham: Jotham did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father Uzziah had done, but not as David did. 1K15

But Jotham's son Ahaz did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Ahaz followed the detestable practices of the Canaanites, and even sacrificed his own son in the fire. 1K16

The son of Ahaz was Hezekiah, he did what was right in eyes of the Lord, just as David had done, no king of Judah did that as well as Hezekiah, either before or after him. 1K18 Can you see where this is going? These people are NOT doing what they learned from their parents, either good or bad.

Hezekiah's son was Manasseh, and that fast, one generation, Judah went from the best king after David to the worst king of all. Manasseh was as bad as the Canaanites in the land before Israel, and actually worse than them. 1K21

Amon was king for a short time, was just like Manasseh, and then Amon's son was Josiah. Josiah did was right in the eyes of the Lord, and followed completely in the ways of his father David, turning neither to the left of the right. He was not like his father Manasseh. 1K22. And Josiah's sons did not live like the way Josiah did, they left the Lord.

There was no guarantee that a godly king would have godly sons, and no guarantee that ungodly kings would have ungodly sons.

Someone might say, that's because they were kings, and they did not really teach their children. That could be, I don't know. But we lead mostly by example, and a lot of sons did not follow their fathers examples.

Even in Proverbs, there is this one verse to parents, encouraging parents to aim their children toward God: *Train up a child in the way it should go, and when it is old it will not leave it.* But that's not all that Proverbs says about this:

Prov 1:8 *Listen, my child, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.*

6:20-21 *Keep your father's command and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them always on your heart; fasten them around your neck.*

10:1 *A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son brings grief to his mother.*

23:22 *Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.*

Here is the question: does the book of Proverbs think it is sure that if parents lead their children to God, the children will serve God? No, not even close. **Proverbs' greater fear is that children will not follow the teaching of their parents.** [2x] That is Proverbs' greater concern.

Our society has overstated how much we are shaped by our environment. We are shaped by our environment, but that can be over played. And our popular theology has made too much of the proverb that says children when old will not leave what they were taught. Our popular theology has ignored the much more frequent urgings to children to take to heart their father's instruction and their mother's teaching. THAT is the emphasis of Proverbs.

It is not God's fault if we keep hammering one sentence from the Bible, and read no more, and then act like that verse is all God has to say about something. Detour on parenting is over.

We are back to the birth of Jesus. We looked at the genealogy, now we'll read the birth story.

Matthew 1:18 *This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

The NIV adds the word "yet," which leads us to assume that the law required Joseph to end the pledge to marry because she was pregnant by someone else. We don't know that. We do know that Joseph wanted to be compassionate toward Mary. In Greek it sounds like his righteousness is what made him compassionate. In any case, he was compassionate.

It seems that Joseph has not heard Mary's side of the story, why she is pregnant. This is probably an arranged marriage, and Joseph and Mary may not live close together, and it was certainly not appropriate for them to be having private conversations before they were married.

²⁰ *But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. We don’t know what Joseph was afraid of, but finding out the baby was from the Holy Spirit put his fears at rest.*

²¹ *She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

The angel said, “Joseph son of David, she will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.” Matthew is very concerned to show that Jesus was in the line of David. That is the main reason for the genealogy. And yet at the crucial event, the child is not in David’s line at all! Joseph is not the father, the Holy Spirit causes the conception.

But the angel told Joseph to name the baby. “Joseph, son of David, you name the child, you make sure you give this boy his name.” Who names the child means something. It is not just a matter of getting the name right. For Joseph to name a baby he did not father means Joseph is adopting that child as his own. [repeat]

Only in that way does Jesus get into the genealogy. If Joseph had gotten married to Mary, but refused to be the one who named the child, Jesus could not be the Christ. Because the Christ had to be in David’s line, and David’s line did not physically father Jesus, but Joseph obeyed the angel and took the baby boy as his own son, by naming him, and in this way Jesus can be Christ.

Call him Jesus, call him “Joshua” actually, which means to save. Call the little guy “Joshua,” because he will save his people from their sins. This is the first line in the NT about being saved from sins, and I think this is the most important line in the Bible about salvation from sins.

Jesus saves his people from their sins. That is the one thing above all the others that we need to know about salvation. At the very center, we are saved by a person. Not saved by faith, or grace, or by the events of death and resurrection. Those are HOW he did it. But at the center, to save us God gave us a person, a champion, a hero. Jesus saves his people from their sins.

What is our part in this? Be one of his people. Let’s be followers of Christ, let’s belong to him, let’s trust him and obey him, let’s be one of his people. Jesus saves his people from their sins.

²² *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). The sign of the child Immanuel, in Isaiah 7, was not just a sign of God’s presence, it was a sign of God’s protection, his care and help.*

God was with them, 14 generations of troubled exiles in Babylon, to protect them and help them. God had not forgotten his old promises to protect and help and take care, God had not forgotten his promise of a Messiah. And after what seemed like forever, God sent the Messiah.

Waiting ends, my brothers and sisters, it does end. The same God will send the same Messiah.

V24 *When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

It sounds like when Joseph woke up, he expedited that wedding. She was already pregnant, and he made the wedding happen as soon as he could. But there was no sexual intimacy before she gave birth.

Last line of the story: *Joseph gave him the name Jesus.* The first line of Matthew 1 - *This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

Genetically, Jesus was not related to David at all. Joseph descended from David, but Joseph did not father the child? And yet it is essential that Jesus be in David's line. How does that work? Joseph named the child, he legally took the child as his own, he adopted Jesus into his family.

Joseph does not say a word in this story. He thinks, he listens, he acts, and thus Jesus is the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

They waited a long time for the Christ to be born. A long time, mostly not an easy time. God kept his promise, and sent the Christ. And now we are those who turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for his Son, Jesus who saves us from the coming wrath. We serve God, and we wait for his Son Jesus, and it will end, because God keeps old promises.

Footnote: Promise, Failure, Waiting, Last Exodus. Matthew 1 leaves God's people in exile in Babylon until the Christ is born. If we take it from there, the Christ will lead God's people out of Babylon. We are now (in a sense) on the last exodus, the last trip out of foreign oppression. We have another Joshua, going into another promised land, another Passover lamb, and another Passover meal. Revelation thinks about Babylon like this, too.