

WHY FOUR GOSPELS? THE FOUR-FOLD PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

in
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

By

Louis T. Talbot

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CHAPTER TWO

CHRIST — THE KING OF ISRAEL

As Portrayed in
The Gospel According to Matthew

THE FIRST COMING OF THE KING

Matthew 1:1-2:23

1. Matthew — The Link between the Old Testament and the New.

For four hundred years God had sent neither angel nor prophet to speak to His chosen people, Israel. From the time of Malachi to the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, “*four hundred silent years*” had passed over the Jew. Even during the bitter persecution of those centuries, God gave no visible manifestation of Himself to the Israelites who trusted in Him. Yet He had not left Himself without a witness in the world; nor had He left His people without guidance; for the faithful remnant in Israel were, unquestionably, searching the pages of the Old Testament for the Messianic prophecies.

Peter tells us plainly that, concerning salvation in Christ Jesus,

“ . . . the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come . . . searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven” (I Peter 1:10-12).

For hundreds of years believing Jews had looked forward to the coming into the world of the long-promised Messiah. Then,

“ . . . when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4, 5).

When God’s hour struck, **“when the fulness of the time was come,”** the Messiah of Israel and Saviour of the world was born in Bethlehem, even as the prophet had spoken seven hundred years previously. And to Matthew was given the privilege of showing that Jesus was born to be the King of the Jews.

Repeatedly he took the Old Testament prophecies, and quoted them to show that, in Christ Jesus, the Scriptures were being fulfilled. The Lord Himself said, in Matthew 5:17, 18:

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”

There are more Old Testament quotations recorded in Matthew than in Mark, Luke and John put together, because — let us never forget it — Matthew was writing particularly for the Jew, who accepted the Old Testament as the inspired Word of God. Any honest seeker after truth, among the chosen people, Israel, seeing how marvelously Christ fulfilled the Messianic prophecies, would accept Him as Lord and King.

Only in Matthew do we read Christ’s words to the Gentile woman who addressed Him as **“Son of David,”**

“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24).

He had not yet offered Himself officially to Israel as her rightful King, in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, there to be rejected by the nation. God’s order is, **“To the Jew first, and also to the Greek”** (Romans 1:16); that is, the Gospel of the kingdom was offered to the Jew first; then, Christ and His kingdom having been rejected by Israel, He gave the Gospel of the grace of God to the Gentiles, as well as to any individual Jews who would believe.

It is noteworthy that, when the Syrophenician (Gentile) woman addressed Christ as **“Lord,”** He honored her faith and answered her prayer (Matthew 15:25-28). As a Gentile, she had no claim upon Him as **“Son of David,”** Israel’s Messiah; but as a believer in His power to save, as one who called Him **“Lord,”** she had a right to claim the answer to her prayer.

In order that we may realize the deep significance of the many fulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament, quoted in Matthew, let us turn to those concerning His birth, to which we referred in our last lesson.

A comparison of the prophecy with the fulfillment presents a challenge to faith that only a skeptic would dare deny:

Old Testament Prophecy

Quotation in Matthew

(1) *Christ's Virgin Birth:*

"The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14, written 742 B.C)..

"Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matthew 1:22, 23).

(2) *Bethlehem, the Place of His Birth:*

"Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2, written 710 B.C)..

"Thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel" (Matthew 2:5, 6).

(3) *Called Out of Egypt:*

"When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hosea 11:1, written 740 B.C)..

". . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Matthew 2:15).

(4) *The Slaughter of the Innocents:*

"Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not" (Jeremiah 31:1S, written 606 B.C)..

"Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not" (Matthew 2:17, 18).

(5) Called a Nazarene:

Probably referring to Isaiah 11:1, as explained in our last lesson.

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

My friend, do you not see how marvelously Matthew links the Old Testament with the New? The above quotations are taken from only the first two chapters of this first Gospel. What a long list we should have, if we wrote down every Old Testament reference, together with Matthew's quotation from it! This would be a very inspiring and helpful exercise for a careful Bible student; and it is to be hoped that many will take time to do it, using any good marginal reference Bible to locate the Old Testament quotations. Such a comparison will prove, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that Matthew, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was proving to Israel that Jesus of Nazareth was her long-promised Messiah and Saviour and King.

It is hardly necessary to explain that the difference in spelling of proper names, and in the translation of the passages compared, is due to the fact that our English Old Testament was translated from the Hebrew language; our English New Testament, from the Greek. To illustrate, the Hebrew name “**Judah**” is spelled “**Juda**” in the Greek. We mention this well-known fact here only because some have asked for such an explanation.

2. The Earthly Lineage of the King

Matthew 1:1-17.

This second lesson in our present series is the logical place to consider the earthly lineage and birth of Israel’s king; but, for two reasons, we studied both of these in some detail in our opening lesson:

- (1) A clear-cut comparison of the two genealogies best explains the purpose of the Holy Spirit in both;
- (2) a comparison of these, and of the two records of the birth of Christ, presents one of the clearest illustrations of the separate purpose of each Gospel record.

Upon one occasion a would-be “intellectual” challenged me with the statement that the two genealogies, found in Matthew and Luke, were contradictory. Then he proceeded to say that Matthew said “**Jacob begat Joseph,**” whereas Luke said Heli was Joseph’s father.

Now, my friend, if you have studied the Bible text carefully, as we tried to explain in our last lesson just what the Holy Spirit did say, then we need not repeat here that the man who challenged the accuracy of the Bible text only showed his gross ignorance of its plain statement.

To his credit, let it be said that he did accept the true meaning of the Scripture in question, once it was explained to him. He had simply reiterated what he had heard some skeptical person say before him; and his experience but illustrates the never-failing truth that men who are honest and fair must accept the whole Bible as the inspired Word of God, if they but give it a chance to find lodgment in their hearts. All so-called contradictions disappear before the honest seeker after truth!

Having compared the two genealogies of Christ in our last lesson, we shall add just here only a few related facts concerning it. One truth which we want to emphasize is set forth in the opening verse of The Gospel According to Matthew. This passage has well been called the key to this record:

“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

How like Genesis 5:1 the phraseology is!

“ . . . the book of the generations of Adam.”

Moreover, this expression is found nowhere else in the New Testament!

What is it but a link between the Old Testament and the New? We have already stated that it was unnecessary for Matthew to go back beyond Abraham, in giving our Lord's genealogy; for the Jews knew the genealogies of Genesis!

But let us look further at Matthew 1:1. Why did the Holy Spirit mention David before He mentioned Abraham, when the latter lived about a thousand years before the shepherd boy who became Israel's king?

This fact becomes the more striking when we read on, to note that, from verse two of this genealogy, the family names are listed in their historical order. Why, then, is our Lord called "**the Son of David**" first; and afterwards, "**the Son of Abraham**"?

We believe this reversed order of these names gives us the key to the book; for as David's Son, Christ had the undisputed right to Israel's throne, and Matthew was proving that He was Israel's rightful King!

The title "**Son of David**" is applied to Christ some ten times in Matthew; whereas "**Son of Abraham**" does not appear in the Gospel again. Why? The answer is significant:

- As David's Son, our Lord possesses the right to David's throne;
- As the Son of Abraham, He is the covenant Heir to Abraham's land; and Israel must accept Him as King before she will inherit the land!

Moreover, it was of Israel's King that Matthew was writing!

With both Abraham and David God had made covenants.

- In Genesis 15:18 we read the extent of the land of Palestine which God promised to Abraham;
- In II Samuel 7:4-17 we read of God's covenant with David for a King to sit upon the throne of David — forever!

Israel's covenant-keeping God will surely give her the Promised Land, but not until Israel accepts David's Son as her rightful King! This she will do when she sees Him coming in power and great glory to take His long-empty throne.

Some years ago a cartoon from the pen of E. J. Pace, D.D., appeared in "*The Sunday School Times*." It was entitled "*The Empty Throne*."

We shall see in our study of Matthew that the Heir to that empty throne was rejected by the nation of Israel nearly two thousand years ago. When He came to be their King, they cried out, saying, "**We will not have this man to rule over us.**" And they thrust him out of the world at the point of a spear. That is why the throne of David is empty now.

The rightful King is seated at God's right hand, from whence He will return one day to sit upon David's throne; for He is the legal Heir.

It is of interest to note that, of all the kings listed in the genealogy of Christ, according to Matthew, only David is called “**king**.” (See Matthew 1:6). Moreover, twice in this verse he is spoken of as “**David the king**.” Thus the theme of the book is once more emphasized — it is of Israel’s King, even Jesus, “**the Son of David**,” that the Holy Spirit was writing!

Again, we ask why the Holy Spirit wrote of “**Judas and his brethren**” (the Hebrew form is “**Judah**”), when Judah was the fourth son of Jacob, not the firstborn? And, again, our answer is that David came from the kingly family of Judah; and Matthew was not attempting to tell about the twelve sons of the patriarch, Jacob; he was giving only the genealogy of Jesus, the King of the Jews!

Before we leave this important subject, let us recall what we considered in our last lesson, lest we forget that Joseph was the one through whom our Lord received His legal right to David’s throne, as the records in the Jewish temple at that time bore witness. Christ’s blood-right to the throne was through Mary, also of David’s family.

And let us not overlook the reassuring truth that, although many of us are Gentiles, and as such, have no right to inherit Abraham’s land, in that day when David’s Son shall sit upon His throne; yet, as blood-bought members of His church, we are the spiritual children of Abraham, the man of faith. (See Romans 4:11, 16, 17; Galatians 3:14). And who can foresee all the glory and the beauty of our heavenly inheritance — who save God?

There is another beautiful lesson that we must not pass by in these opening verses of Matthew.

It has to do with verse five, where we read that Rahab, the harlot of Joshua’s day, was the mother of Boaz, the husband of Ruth. Thus this sinful woman, because of her great faith in the God of Israel, became the great-great-grandmother of David, the king; and one of the ancestors of the royal family, through whom Christ came, “**according to the flesh**.”

It is an object lesson to us in the grace of God. How great is His forgiving love! He takes the vilest sinner, cleanses him from every crimson stain, and exalts him to “**heavenly places in Christ Jesus**” — if only that sinner will believe in His atoning work on Calvary’s Cross. “**All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God**.” Rahab’s gross sin was also David’s sin, and Solomon’s, and Judah’s! Yes; “**all have sinned!**”

But God loves the sinner; and He wants him to be forgiven. Do you know Him as your personal Saviour and Lord, my friend?

3. The Heavenly Descent of the King

Matthew 1:18-25.

Before we read again the sacred story of the virgin birth of Israel’s King, as recorded in the chapter before us, let us turn once more to the parallel passage in Luke 1:26-38; for, in point of time, the visit of the Angel Gabriel to Mary preceded that of “**the angel of the Lord**” to Joseph.

To Mary the angel had said,

“Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:31-33).

In answer to Mary’s question of verse 34, the Angel Gabriel told her the miraculous words of verse 35, words which establish the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus, the eternal God who became Man, in order to die for sinners:

“And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

“And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her” (Luke 1:38).

It was some time after this strangely wonderful scene, how long we do not know that **“the angel of the Lord”** appeared to Joseph. Just here let us turn back to Matthew 1:18-25, to read again the sequel to Luke’s record. Joseph was **“espoused”** to, or engaged to be married to, Mary. He evidently did not understand about the miracle of the virgin birth that was soon to come to pass. But he was **“a just man,”** a godly Jew; and because he loved Mary, he **“was minded to put her away privily”**; that is, break the engagement quietly.

“But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20, 21).

Then follows the quotation from Isaiah concerning the virgin birth of Christ which we have already considered. It is not without significance that, in this wonderful dream, **“the angel of the Lord”** addressed Joseph as **“son of David”**; for this is but another proof of the fact that God was establishing Jesus’ legal right to David’s throne.

It was the highest privilege and the most sacred duty that ever fell to humankind, that the Saviour should be born into that humble home! To be the mother of the Son of God, to be the legal father — not the natural father — of Israel’s King — can we even begin to comprehend all that this involved? Yet, before the unbelieving, skeptical, mocking world, it meant also the unjust accusations of wicked men.

Nothing is told us in the Bible of Joseph’s and Mary’s replies to their false and wicked claims, that Jesus was the illegitimate son of Joseph. But we may well believe that they were called upon to bear such insults — for Jesus’ sake.

That they were glad to suffer reproach for Him, seems evident, judging from their ready responses to the messages of the angels; for Mary said to the Angel Gabriel,

“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.”

And, once **“the angel of the Lord”** explained the miracle to him, Joseph

“ . . . being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: and knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS” (Matthew 1:24, 25).

That little word, **“till,”** establishes two fundamental truths:

- (1) Mary was still a virgin when Jesus was born;
- (2) after Jesus was born, she and Joseph had sons and daughters, despite what the Roman Catholic Church says regarding her never having married.

How many daughters they had, we do not know; but the Holy Spirit names their four sons and refers to daughters in Matthew 13:55, 56; Mark 6:3.

The Catholics teach that Mary was born without sin, as Christ was; that she was always the Virgin Mary; that prayers offered to her have more weight with her Son than if presented to the Father directly in His name. The Bible teaches no such doctrine! Without any question, Mary was a devout woman, one who loved God and lived a beautiful life for His glory. But Mary herself sang her song of praise to God for her own personal Saviour, when she said, in Luke 1:46, 47,

“My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.”

Moreover, she was one of the early believers in **“the upper room,”** waiting for the promise of the Spirit, even as her Son and her risen Lord had bidden His disciples. (See Acts 1:14). And that is the last time her name appears in the New Testament! Does it not stand to reason that, if God had intended her to receive worship and the prayers of saints, He would have mentioned her name again, in all the pages that follow Acts 1:14?

Neither the Lord Jesus nor Mary made a single statement that could be so construed; on the contrary, all Scripture teaching proves that Mary’s Son was her Lord and Saviour.

Seven hundred years before the virgin-born Son of God and King of Israel lay in Bethlehem’s manger, the prophet had written that He should be both human and divine. **“A Child”** was to be **“born,”** in human flesh; **“a Son”** was to be **“given”**; that is, sent down from heaven:

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

My friend, God does not ask us to understand the mystery of the virgin birth of Christ; He asks us to believe it.

We do not try to understand the supernatural; we accept it in simple faith. In the passage which we have just read from Isaiah, God was telling His people that their Messiah would be both God and Man. As God, He can never die; therefore, He had to become a Man, in order to bear the sins of Israel and of all the Gentile world “**in his own body on the tree**” (I Peter 2:24). But, even as He became Man, He also had to be eternal God, in order to be the sinless, all-powerful Saviour.

Upon this foundation truth, our Christian faith stands or falls. Either Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, as Isaiah and Matthew and Luke and Paul and all the sacred writers state; or we have no Saviour and Israel has no Messiah. To say that Jesus was only a good Man, a good Example, is to deny His eternal deity, His power to save from sin. To deny that He was born of the Holy Spirit, is to rob Him of that eternal deity — yea, to make Him a false witness; for repeatedly He claimed to be “**God manifest in the flesh.**”

Let us hold to this fundamental teaching; and never tire in making it known!

4. The Search of the Wise Men for the King

Matthew 2:1-12.

The question of the wise men, upon their arrival in Jerusalem, indicates why it was Matthew who was led by the Holy Spirit to record the story of their search; for they were looking for “**the King of the Jews.**”

It is significant that they did not ask for the Saviour; they asked, rather, “**Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.**”

Their question lets us know why Mark, Luke and John did not include the incident in their Gospels; they were not emphasizing the coming of Israel's King; they were presenting yet other phases of Christ's Person and work.

The wise men went to the royal city, seeking the King, taking to Him their gifts, offering to Him their worship. But they did not find Him in Jerusalem; He was outside the royal city — suggestive of the fact that later on the nation of Israel was to cast Him out of their midst, and crucify Him outside the city wall.

The scribes and the chief priests were without excuse; they knew the Scriptures, for they told the wise men where the King should be born.

- Why did they not accompany the wise men to Bethlehem?
- Why did they not go with their gifts and their worship?

Because they were indifferent to His coming and indifferent to His rightful claims to the throne of David.

The wise men were Gentiles, from the east; and again there is the suggestion of the fact that Israel's rejection of her King would be followed by the Gentiles' receiving Him as a Saviour. Yet the sins of Jew and Gentile were to send Him to the cross; and Herod, the Roman ruler, as well as the leaders of the nation of Israel, sought to slay Him.

There may have been a great company of wise men from the east; we do not know. Certainly there is nothing to prove the tradition that there were only three. They did present to the Christ-Child three kinds of gifts — gold and frankincense and myrrh.

- The gold speaks to us of the deity of Israel's King;
- The frankincense, of the fragrance of His sinless life on earth;
- The myrrh, of His approaching death.

John tells us that Nicodemus “**brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes**” to prepare the Lord's body for burial (John 19:39). And we know that myrrh was used for this purpose.

Again, the supernatural warning of God to the wise men, not to return unto Herod, reminds us of His supernatural coming into the world.

Think of it! The appearance of “**the angel of the Lord**” to Joseph, of the Angel Gabriel to Mary, of “**the angel of the Lord**” and “a multitude of the heavenly host” to the shepherds, of the star in the east guiding the wise men, of the warning of God in a dream that they should not return unto Herod — these were some of the miracles attending the first coming of the King of Israel into the world! And yet His own people were indifferent or openly hostile to Him!

5. The Flight into Egypt — The Birthplace of Israel

Matthew 2:13-16

It was Satan who prompted Herod to seek the life of the new-born King. Satan did not want Him to come into the world, to die for sinners, or to return as “**King of kings and Lord of lords.**” But again God overruled Satan's wiles; and a second time “**the angel of the Lord**” appeared unto Joseph in a dream, saying,

“Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him” (Matthew 2:13).

Thus another Old Testament Scripture was fulfilled; for, as we have seen, God had said that His Son should be “**called out of Egypt.**”

It was in Egypt that the nation of Israel was born, on that first Passover night; and it was “**out of Egypt**” that Israel's King was called to return to the land of promise.

- “**Out of Egypt**” the nation was called to serve God in their own land;
- “**Out of Egypt**” the King was called to die for His people, Israel, and for the whole world.

6. The Attempt of Herod against the King's Life

Matthew 2:16-18

It was a cruel, despicable and cowardly act of Herod that demanded the slaughter of the little children in Israel; but Herod was prompted by Satan again. God foreknew that he would commit this awful crime; and foreknowing it, He wrote it in the book of Jeremiah, that all Israel might know that another Scripture was being fulfilled concerning the coming of their King. But Israel was as spiritually blind as Herod was coldly cruel. The human heart, out of Christ, does not change; and the world's history is filled with the wicked devices of unregenerate men!

7. The Return to Nazareth — That Despised City

Matthew 2:19-23

A third time “**the angel of the Lord**” appeared in a dream to Joseph, this time in the land of Egypt. Herod was dead; and God was telling Joseph to take the young Child and Mary back “**into the land of Israel.**” Note the words, “**into the land of Israel.**” And note also that Joseph obeyed the command of the Lord, “**and came into the land of Israel**” (verses 20, 21). Does it seem an accident that twice in this passage the Holy Spirit spoke of “**the land of Israel**” — here and nowhere else in the New Testament? No; it is not strange; for He was writing of Israel's King, who had promised His people a land, the land of Palestine. Thank God! Israel will one day receive her King and inherit her land. Then she will no longer be the “*people of the wandering feet,*” weary, despised, hated, and persecuted. If only she had received her King when He came to present Himself to His people! How much heartache and suffering might have been saved! Yet, knowing He would be rejected, He came to die — for Israel and for the Gentile world!

Not only was the message of the prophets fulfilled when Joseph turned aside into Nazareth, and Jesus was “**called a Nazarene**”; but there is also a suggestion of the shame and reproach He was to bear as the lowly Nazarene. The city of Nazareth, we are told, was “the most despised place in that despised province of Galilee.” And it was the scene of the early years of the One who came to be “**despised and rejected of men,**” in order that He might redeem them from sin and death.

For a fourth time God had warned Joseph “**in a dream,**” this time telling him to turn aside “**into the parts of Galilee.**” With what infinite care God guarded and protected the Christ-Child! With what faithful love Joseph and Mary must have held in trust this sacred responsibility and joy! Satan might attempt the Child's life; but God protected Him; indeed, God Himself had come into the world to rob Satan of his power; and God is all-wise, as well as all-powerful. It is a beautiful story — the story of the birth of the King of Israel. It is the story of the love of God made known to sinful man. And throughout eternity the redeemed shall praise Him for such love!

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