

**GOD'S CONTRAST COMMUNITY**  
**Genesis 12:1-3; Matthew 1:1**  
**December 7, 2020**

**Matthew 1:1 (CSB) <sup>1</sup>An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:**

Why is it that Matthew won't let us to get to the birth of Jesus until we have ploughed through 17 verses of *this person begat this person*? Why can't we just start with — *The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit.*  
(Matthew 1:18 CSB)

The answer is this: The birth of Jesus is not a stand-alone story — it is part of a very long story that was all about Him from the start.

His opening verse sums up the whole story: Jesus, who is the Messiah, was the son of David and the son of Abraham. These two names are the key markers for the three main sections of the story of Jesus: from Abraham to David; from David to the Babylonian exile; from the exile to Jesus himself (those 400 dark, silent years we talked about two Sundays ago).

Matthew compresses that long story into seventeen verses (there would come a day when Jesus would compress that long story into a single parable about a vineyard and its tenant farmers).

Matthew opens his record of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus with those seventeen verses because we will only understand Jesus properly if we see him in the light of the story that is compressed into those verses. The Old Testament tells the story that Jesus completes. We not only look at Jesus in the light of the history of the Old Testament — but Jesus sheds light back on to the Old Testament.

I don't know if you have ever made a long journey that involved planning and logistics — and along the way encountered hardships and a bit of confusion

— but you are able to understand that journey in the light of its destination. Not many people enjoy their journey through the books of the Old Testament because they don't understand that those 39 books lead to Jesus — nor do they understand that Jesus gives meaning to those 39 books.

**Matthew 1:1 (CSB) <sup>1</sup>An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:**

Genealogies were a big deal for the descendants of Abraham. They established your identity as a man or woman who belonged to Covenant people of YHWH. In his letter to the Romans the apostle Paul describes what a huge thing that was

**Romans 9:4 (CSB) <sup>4</sup>They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple service, and the promises.**

Matthew **begins** His account of the Good News by telling us that the Good News is about Jesus, who was not just “a man” — He was a specific man anchored in the history of the Jewish nation. We can only understand **who** Jesus is, **why** Jesus came, and **what** Jesus taught in light of His relationship to Abraham — in light of the history of Abraham's descendants — and in light of His deep roots in His Hebrew Scriptures.

DON'T MISS THIS — The more we dig into THAT, the bigger our view of the Gospel!

**Matthew 1:1 (CSB) <sup>1</sup>An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:**

Carried along by the Holy Spirit, Matthew makes it a point to tell us that the Good News is about a man named Jesus — who is Christ (Messiah) — the son of Abraham. That means that Jesus belongs to a particular people whose very reason for existence was to bring blessing to the rest of humanity.

WE CANNOT MISS THIS — Genesis 1–11 is occupied with humanity as a whole and with the problem of evil that pervaded ALL of humanity. The story of Israel, which begins at chapter 12, is God's answer to the problem of humanity.

**Genesis 12:1–3 (CSB)** <sup>1</sup>The Lord said to Abram: Go from your land, your relatives, and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

All of God’s dealings with Israel are actually God taking care of His unfinished business with all of humanity. Israel existed because of God’s desire to redeem people from every nation and Matthew wanted his Jewish readers to know that Jesus is the promised seed of Abraham who would make the promise of God to Abraham a reality.

What we celebrate at Christmas is MASSIVE! We celebrate the birth of the One who completes the story of the Old Testament.

**I want to zero in on Israel’s history** — zero in on how their unique status as the people of God and their unique experience of God’s redeeming power **speaks to us** who have believed that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham — the promised Savior of the world — who alone can forgive sin; who alone can redeem men and women from the penalty and power of sin, who alone can reconcile men and women to God who is life — who alone makes a way for us to live in the presence of God forever in a New Heaven and a New Earth.

**1 Corinthians 10:11 (CSB)** <sup>11</sup>These things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

PLEASE UNDERSTAND that as we look at how their unique relationship with God speaks to the church — the church does not replace Israel. God has unfinished business with Israel as a nation that centers on their Messiah, the Lord Jesus.

Israel’s **existence** was owing to God’s unique intervention in the life of a man named Abraham. We are clearly in the bounds of Scripture to say: “God so loved the world that he chose Israel.” Israel was going to be “the womb” (if-you-would) through which God would bring the Savior of the world. God would give His only begotten Son through the descendants of Abraham — and specifically through the descendants of a king named David.

Israel's **preservation** as a nation was owing to God's unique redemptive acts — especially rescuing the descendants of Abraham from **genocide** under the hand of Pharaoh in Egypt! He did it in a powerful way — showing the gods of Egypt to be nothing before Him — proving that He alone is God. He referred to their deliverance with the term **redemption**.

**Deuteronomy 7:8 (CSB)** <sup>8</sup>But because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors, he brought you out with a strong hand and **redeemed you from the place of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.**

That redemption involved the slaughter of a lamb without spot and without blemish — anticipating the sacrificial death of THE Lamb of God, Jesus.

**FOLLOW ME HERE** — Exactly 90 days after God redeemed them from bondage and death in Egypt they arrived at Mt. Sinai (sometimes referred to as Mt. Horeb). Here's what God said to Moses.

**Exodus 19:3–6 (CSB)** .... “This is what you must say to the house of Jacob and explain to the Israelites: <sup>4</sup>‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup>Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup>**and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.**’ These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites.”

THIS IS SO HUGE — Christopher **Wright** (Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament)

*“Israel’s unique historical experience was not a ticket to a cozy state of privileged favoritism. Rather it laid upon the people a **missionary task** and a **moral responsibility.**”*

Beginning in **Exodus 20** God frames the way Israel was to live out their covenant relationship with Him. We call them commands — they called them “words” or “statutes.” The first 10 are very famous, right?! We find the rest of those terms laid out in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy — 613 in total — but He eases them in with the first 10! God has rescued a people to Himself. They are a unique

people among all the peoples of the earth in their origin. They are a unique people among all the peoples of the world in their preservation. Their unique origin and preservation is wrapped up in their unique purpose of being the people through whom God would bring salvation to ALL the peoples of the world.

The terms of the covenant were not the means that they would earn their unique status with God. God wanted the descendants of Abraham to be unique — to be a contrast community among the nations that were serving false gods — a people who would stand in contrast to the peoples that were organizing their lives without God and against God.

At the very center — the very essence of their contrast in the world was the very first command

**Exodus 20:1–3 (CSB)** <sup>1</sup>Then God spoke all these words: <sup>2</sup>I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. <sup>3</sup>Do not have other gods besides me.

These terms were intended to shape this special people, this uniquely redeemed people into a people on mission for YHWH in the world — shape them into a nation that was holy (set apart) unto their redeeming God. They would be a nation that was *other than* all other nations in the God they worshipped — in the things they valued — in the way they treated one another — in the way they lived. CONTRAST!!

When this special people, this uniquely redeemed people had no regard for the terms of the covenant — especially concerning loyalty to the only true God — they actually became just like the nations around them.

**Amos 9:7 (CSB)** <sup>7</sup>Israelites, are you not like the Cushites to me?

In our English Bibles the section of the Old Testament we call the historical books gives to us the brutally honest account of how by and large this special and uniquely redeemed people failed to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But this is interesting and worth remembering in the new year when we once again begin our calendar of reading through the Bible. In the day of Jesus the Old Testament existed in the form of a three-part collection of scrolls: Torah, Nevi'im,

and Kethubim. I want to take a second to look at the second collection of scrolls.

Nevi'im = The Prophets. Besides containing Isaiah – Jeremiah – Ezekiel and the Book of the Twelve (Hosea-Malachi), it also contained the books of Joshua – Judges – Samuel – Kings! Those books were not considered merely historical — they were considered to be prophetic. One guy called them “The Minority report” because they told the history of Israel — not from man’s point of view — but from God’s. And from God’s point of view the nation had massively failed in its mission and witness — failed to be the “contrast community” God intended them to be.

Despite the failure of Israel, God was faithful to the promise he made to Abraham. He was faithful to speak more and more about the coming of Jesus through the prophets. Jesus — Son of God — promised Messiah and Savior of the world came into the world as a descendant of Abraham and from the kingly line of David and shed His blood to redeem us.

The apostle Paul said that all of the things written in the Nevi'im concerning the way God looked at the history of Israel were written for the sake of all who believe with their hearts on the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament the apostle Peter dips into the language of God concerning Israel to tell Christians about their mission and witness

**1 Peter 2:9 (CSB)** <sup>9</sup>But **you** are a **chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you** may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Though we do not replace Israel — Israel pictures and anticipates the fact that God desires every authentic Christian — and every community of Christians to be a contrast people!

Jesus called His disciples “the Salt of the Earth... and if the salt has lost its savor what good is for except to be trodden under foot.” Jesus called us “the Light of the World” — “A City on a Hill.” The Beatitudes and the rest of the Sermon on the Mount define the way His disciples were to live as a contrast community in the unbelieving world.

**Matthew 6:32–33 (CSB)** <sup>32</sup>For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup>But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.

Following Jesus is a radical life. It is not a matter of “life according to fallen culture” (its values and ways) with a side order of Jesus/twist of Jesus.

I recently came across an article in which the author described Christians and churches whose mission and witness embrace in large part mainstream culture but with a twist of Christianity.

*I am not religious, so it is not my place to dictate to Christians what they should and should not believe. Still, if someone has a faith worth following, I feel that their beliefs should make me feel uncomfortable for not doing so. If they share 90 percent of my lifestyle and values, then there is nothing especially inspiring about them. Instead of making me want to become more like them, it looks very much as if they want to become more like me. ~ Ben Sixsmith December 6, 2020 The Spectator.*

The New Testament describes the way we’re to live out our New Covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ. In his letter to the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians in Ephesus, the apostle Paul spends three chapters describing what God has done for us in, through, with and by Jesus to make **us** His unique people. Then he spends the last three chapters telling us what it looks like to **live** a contrast life in a world that is living without Jesus and against Jesus. Here’s a snippet

**Ephesians 4:1–3 (CSB)** <sup>1</sup>Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

**Ephesians 4:17; 20–24 (CSB)** <sup>17</sup>Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thoughts....  
<sup>20</sup>But that is not how you came to know Christ, <sup>21</sup>assuming you heard about him and were taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, <sup>22</sup>to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, <sup>23</sup>to be renewed

in the spirit of your minds, <sup>24</sup>and to put on the new self, the one created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth.

**Ephesians 4:31–32 (CSB)** <sup>31</sup>Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup>And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.

**Ephesians 5:1–2 (CSB)** <sup>1</sup>Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, <sup>2</sup>and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.

NONE of those things EARN our salvation — EARN our status as the beloved of God, adopted children of God, members of the household of God and heirs of salvation. Our salvation and our privileged relationship with God are all of grace — received by faith. But those things do describe the way our Lord and Savior wants our lives to look like.

In another letter Paul describes the way the believers in Thessalonica lived in contrast to pagan culture

**1 Thessalonians 1:8–10 (CSB)** <sup>8</sup>For the word of the Lord rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God has gone out. Therefore, we don't need to say anything, <sup>9</sup>for they themselves report what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God <sup>10</sup>and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.