THE COMING OF THE KING

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ are fourteen generations.
Matthew 1:17

Before we move forward, let's look at the verse above to set up the context of Matthew's Gospel, and how the *person* and *purpose* of Jesus Christ is glorified in the genealogy and sets up the remainder of Matthew's account.

Matthew has taken a list of some forty-plus names and transformed it into a little theology of God. For the genealogy teaches what theology calls God's nature. God's mercy, God's justice, and God's faithfulness - these are the elements of Matthew's little theology of God in his three-pronged, N-shaped genealogy. The genealogy is a more exciting text than usually credited. These seventeen verses are a prose poem, which echoes much of what Luke's Magnificat and Benedictus say in a poetic mode. But when the major German-language commentator discovered how 'contrived' the genealogy was, he concluded that "it is not by accident that this text is rarely used for preaching nowadays." If one looks at the genealogy theologically, however, rather than only historically-critically, as I think Matthew invites us to do by his several audacities, I can think of few more compact or creative doctrines of God in the whole of Scripture or theology.
Brunner – Matthew, page 21

How true this statement is. In the genealogy Matthew sets forth, with its exclusion of specific kings, its inclusion of women – some of dubious distinction – and its complex yet faithful lineage, Matthew sets forth the mercy of God, His judgment, and above all, His faithfulness to what He has promised and fulfills in the Person of Jesus Christ, Israel's True Israel, the Messiah.

The "book of origins of Jesus Christ," far from being simply the recitation of historical data for their own sake, is above all an artistically devised theological statement. The data are important in providing the vehicle for the initial presentation of Jesus as the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham and David. Indeed, the responsibilities and hopes of Israel, bound up as they are with the preparation of the past, receive their realization in the one who is the subject of Matthew's narrative. There is, moreover, a certain appropriateness about the timing of this fulfillment, coming as it does at the end of three segments of time that can be expressed as 3 x 14, segments marked by Abraham, David, and the Babylonian captivity. Behind these events, the highest and lowest points in the history of Israel, stands the sovereign God, who works out all things in the accordance with his purpose and timing. Further evidence of that remarkable

sovereignty and its salvific intent can be seen in the surprising inclusion of irregular and sometimes scandalous events, as reflected in the four women of the genealogy, which prepare for the actual circumstances of Jesus' birth. Matthew has in this opening pericope anticipated the fulfillment theme that is so prominent in the Gospel. And concluding this skillful presentation of the genealogy of Jesus, he turns to events surrounding the birth itself.

Hagner – Matthew, page 12

What the metanarrative of Matthew's Gospel reveals to us all is that the promises given to Abraham and David, find their way to fulfilling the deepest needs of all humanity in a global and historic fashion. The birth of Jesus, coming as it does, following the return of the exiles from Babylon, is significant. Judah has returned to the land of promise, yet they remain in exile. True restoration requires a greater deliverer than Moses, a greater king than David, and a greater father than Abraham. Thus, Matthew traces the lineage and history of this One who will be the Greatest, through Abraham, through David and through the exile to Babylon and back. Now back in the land and awaiting the promised Messiah, all humanity sits in exile. Matthew's Gospel will now present the Messiah, the greater than Moses who will lead his people through a Second Exodus to the fulfillment of the Promised Land in the recreated cosmos. There he will be their King, the One greater than David. There, at the fulfillment of all history and promise, these children of God will gather with their greater Father, whom Abraham foreshadowed, and find their final rest from the wanderings of millennia in foreign lands.

Now the birth – γένεσις – of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 1:18

This verse begins the same way v.1 began, with the idea of a *genesis* taking place. Again, we see Matthew directing the reader's attention to the concept of *beginnings* or *origins* where it concerns Jesus Messiah. The creation account in Genesis by the Word of God foreshadows the recreation of the created order through the Word of God.

The *genesis* of Jesus (and more accurately, of faith in Jesus), within any human life, is the work of the Spirit. Just as the Spirit was the active agent in the creative account of the world, so too, is the Spirit the agent of creation in each person who believes.

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And <u>the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the deep</u>.

Genesis 1:2

And the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.
Genesis 8:11
And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the waters and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him.
Matthew 3:16

The recapitulated narrative of Scripture ultimately finds its fulfillment in Jesus Messiah. From *creation* to the flood story of *recreation* to the story of Jesus and *fulfillment-restoration creation.*

In this sense, every conversion to this Messiah *is a virgin birth* and typifies that Mary's pregnancy before marriage to Joseph was humiliation and scandal. Through the Spirit however, every scandalous life is turned into a gospel account of God's glory and grace through the Spirit.

before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.
Matthew 1:18

Matthew stresses this concept by making sure we know that the Spirit was indeed the agent in the birth narrative of Jesus.

We do not have here the pagan notion of a god having sexual relations with a woman. This account is of the creative power of God at work within Mary in order to accomplish his purpose.

Note the language in this verse has overtly Jewish overtones which reveal the Christological nature of Mary's son and his connection to the Abrahamic and Davidic promises.

Matthew stresses this because of the connection he desires to convey between Jesus and the Spirit. The promised deliverance and fulfillment of the promise rest upon the coming era marked by the power of the Spirit, bringing with it an eschatological note.

God chose this method to introduce the Messiah to Israel. Such a method was going to always cause some embarrassment and offense to someone.

But then again, the ending of the Messiah's life featured the same elements of embarrassment and offense as the Promised One died as a crucified criminal.

And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.
Matthew 1:19

By giving Mary a letter of divorce "quietly", Joseph was prepared to take social shame on himself, without complaint. In this sense we have a Christlike example of substitutionary atonement.

Joseph's righteousness here is seen in his benevolent attitude to Mary.

Joseph's righteousness compels him to act faithfully, which by the law's standard meant that Marh should be exposed as an adulteress and suffer the punishment of death by stoning under Deuteronomy 22:20-21, 23-24.

Joseph did want to expose Mary as an adulteress, yet neither would he marry one so obviously guilty of sin. He chose the other option open to him: formal divorce proceedings in relative privacy (which meant two witnesses were required). Joseph's plan then expresses his righteousness and kindness.

> *But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Jospeh, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*
> *Matthew 1:20*

This is the first time we are told that Mary's condition was revealed to Joseph.

> *But Joseph was overcome by a divine intervention and was moved to make a new decision. In Jesus a "revaluation of values" commences in history, a revaluation that continues wherever the gospel is faithfully preached.*
> *Bruner – Matthew, page 26*

Righteous Joseph did not follow the leanings of the law. He neither exposed Mary nor divorced her. Rather, he acted in a manner consistent with the Savior's teaching of mercy *which was prescribed within the law.*

Note the deliberate reference to Joseph as the son of David which harkens us back to v.1. Interesting is that this is the only place in the Gospels where this designation is applied to someone other than Jesus.

Through Joseph's obedience, Jesus becomes the legal son of Joseph and therefore, through Joseph, is reckoned as of Davidic descent. Though we are only in the first chapter of Matthew, the eschatological overtones are obvious.

Though Joseph and Mary were already husband and wife by the cultural betrothal of the time, the *"take Mary as your wife"* or as some translations say, *take Mary home with you*, puts the last portion of the ceremony of marriage in place making their union one of being publicly official.

> *She will <u>bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus</u>, for he will save his people from their sins.*
> *Matthew 1:21*

> *Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall <u>bring forth a son</u>, <u>and you shall call his name Emmanuel</u>.*
> *Isaiah 7:14*

Matthew's language follows the LXX here of Isaiah 7:14.

The naming of a male child took place formally at the time of circumcision on the eighth day after birth. The naming of children in first century Jewish culture pointed to the actual character and destiny of the child.

Technically, Isaiah does not give the name of the child as Jesus. Matthew, however, gives reason as to why he reports the name as *one who will save his people from their sins.* Being of Abrahamic descent, Matthew understands that the name of the Messiah in rabbinic view came before the creation of the world.

> *Wasn't it taught in the Baraita: Seven phenomena were created before the world was created, and they are; Torah, and repentance, and the Garden of Eden, and Gehenna, and the Throne of God, and the Temple, and the name of the Messiah.*
> *b. Pesah 54a*

> *he will save his people from their sins.*
> *Matthew 1:21*

> *O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*
> *Psalm 130:8*

The introduction of Jesus thus far in Matthew's narrative has been as the *Son of David,* the *Christ (Messiah),* the one who has come to fulfill the promises of God.

Who are *his people*?

1) Israel – the Old Covenant ethnic nation of Israel.
2) Ekklesia – the New Covenant people who Jesus mentions in Matthew 16:18.
3) The True Israel – Those who regardless of Covenant, draw near to Yahweh and receive the knowledge that is from Jesus and a birth that is from the Spirit.

Vatican II, convened in the early 1960's, called this last group of people – *"the 3rd Race."*

I would prefer this last designation. It fits well with Matthew's Gospel of an ever-widening circle of Christ's saving power and influence – *the progress of salvation.*

> *And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my ekklesia, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*
> *Matthew 16:18*

> *For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*
> *Matthew 26:28*

The language of *"he shall save his people from their sins"* is so familiar to us that it's hard to see how contrary it is from the Messianic expectation that was common in the time Matthew wrote his Gospel.

Thou, O Lord, didst choose David (to be) king over Israel, And swaredst to him touching his seed that never should his kingdom fail before Thee.
But, for our sins, sinners rose up against us; They assailed us and thrust us out; What Thou hadst not promised to them, they took away (from us) with violence.
They in no wise glorified Thy honorable name; They set a (worldly) monarchy in place of (that which was) their excellency;
They laid waste the throne of David in tumultuous arrogance. But Thou, O God, didst cast them down and remove their seed from the earth,
In that there rose up against them a man that was alien to our race.
According to their sins didst Thou recompense them, O God; So that it befell them according to their deeds.
Psalm of Solomon 17

This Psalm describes a Davidic, messianic figure who will purge Jerusalem of Gentiles, gather the exiles and lead them in righteousness and shepherd the Lord's flock in righteousness.

Three great bondages – past and present - plagued the minds of the Jews in Jesus day: the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Romans. These would be representative of the pagan *sinners* mentioned in the Psalm of Solomon above.

Given this understanding -

A Messiah who came at this time and not at least deliver the people politically from their enemies' sins could hardly be considered a serious full-blooded Messiah. A Liberator who came only to save his people from sins and not sinners seemed piddly. A Messiah who did not save his people politically and economically must have struck a serious Jew as an excessively spiritual, or in the words of later Christan theology, as a docetic (Jesus only seemed to be physical) Messiah. But Jesus' work in this Gospel is first of all to liberate his people from their own evils – he will save his people from their sins.

Matthew's Jesus will not rivet his people's attention on an external enemy as most radical movements do, nor will he forge a burning hatred for enemies by which to ignite a revolution. Jesus concentrates the fire of almost his entire Gospel on the church's sins. Hell in Matthew, for example, is not a place by which external enemies of the people of God are threatened; hell is always the existential threat for precisely those who think they are the people of God.

Given these Biblical texts and Matthew's focus on a larger scope covering God's people, if one thinks *"his people"* refers only to ethnic Israel, assuredly Matthew's readers were capable of a deeper understanding of the expression. An understanding that included Jews and Gentiles as the people of the messianic king – *his people of the 3rd Race.*

How then does he save his people from their sins? Does Luke offer us a clue?

> *And your child will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people, in the forgiveness of their sins.*
> *Luke 1:76-77*

For his part, Matthew does not offer a clue, nor does he give any allusion to the cross.

This leaves us with the entirety of Matthew's Gospel. Could the *"how Jesus saves his people from their sins"* be encapsulated by the whole context of Matthew's twenty-eight chapters?

Matthew's Gospel clearly makes obedience to Jesus' commands a means of grace – and these commands are often contained within the contexts of promise and grace.

Example: his commands in the Sermon on the Mount are preceded by his gracious Beatitudes and followed by his gift of the Lord's prayer.

Since, however, the Passion of Christ at the scene of the crucifixion seems to be the direction Matthew's Gospel directs us toward – and of course the subsequent resurrection – then the answer to *"how does he save his people from their sins"* certainly must include redemption at the site of the cross.

Therefore, the entirety of Matthew's Gospel must be read in light of its end. It is in that endeavor, beholding the ministry of Jesus Messiah, his *person* and his *purpose*, that we can, through his humiliation and triumph, understand the *how* of salvation.