

# *Immanuel: God with Us*

## WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

1<sup>st</sup> in an eight-week series

June 7, 2020

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*Matthew 1:1*

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

*Matthew 1:18-25 (NRSV)*

<sup>18</sup>Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. <sup>20</sup>But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup>**All this took place to fulfill** what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

<sup>23</sup>Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

*Matthew 2:13-23 (NRSV)*

<sup>13</sup>Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." <sup>14</sup>Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, <sup>15</sup>and remained there until the death of Herod. **This was to fulfill** what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

<sup>16</sup>When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. <sup>17</sup>**Then was fulfilled** what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

<sup>18</sup>"A voice was heard in Ramah,  
wailing and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

<sup>19</sup>When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, <sup>20</sup>"Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." <sup>21</sup>Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup>But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. <sup>23</sup>There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets **might be fulfilled**, "He will be called a Nazorean."

*Jesus Christ is nothing less than the fulfillment of all God's promises.*

When Matthew sat down to begin writing his gospel of Jesus, he made a seemingly curious choice. He began with a genealogy, encompassing nearly two millennia of the Jewish story. Why? The first sentence of the Gospel lays it out for us. Jesus is the Messiah and can lay claim to the House of David and, like all Jews, to kinship with Abraham. Further, though the English translations all refer to Jesus' "genealogy," the Greek word is actually *genesis*, meaning "beginning" or "origin." Matthew could have chosen the same word for "beginning" as did Mark in his first sentence, *arché*, but instead he chose the word which names the first book of the Bible. Matthew wants us to grasp that Jesus has been part of God's purposes from the beginning. And not

merely a part, but the *fulfillment* of God's purposes. The creative work of God is the creative work of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

### Genealogies

One of the most interesting things about Israel's many Old Testament genealogies is that in other ancient Near Eastern literature, genealogies are rare. Other cultures kept lists of kings, but the Israelites kept and passed on extensive family genealogies. Understanding why only Israel, will help us understand the importance of the biblical genealogies.

We can think of the genealogies as providing length and breadth to God's people. First, the lengthy genealogies concretely tied God's people of each generation with the ancient ancestors who had first entered into covenant with God and those who had sustained it. Thus, Matthew's genealogy for Jesus goes back all the way to Abraham.

Second, the genealogies provided breadth in that they expressed the Israelites' kinship, the social, religious, and political ties they shared. Ultimately, they were one tribe, one people . . . all of whom could trace their genealogy back to Jacob and then Isaac and then Abraham.

The Good News of Jesus Christ is for all people at all times and in all places who are bound together into one people through faith in Jesus Christ and faith alone. As Paul wrote, "Understand, then that those who have faith are children of Abraham." We have a genealogy of our own!

### Fulfillment

Matthew spends a lot of time talking about fulfillment. He uses the word "fulfill" fifteen times in his gospel to describe the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He doesn't do so in a simplistic, dot-connecting manner; rather, for Matthew Jesus is nothing less than the fulfillment of all God's promises. The writings of the prophets are filled with oracles about the great work God would do one day. By Jesus' day, many Jews had lost confidence that God would keep those promises. The pagans still ruled and the priests were still corrupt. But Matthew makes it clear that Jesus is God's promise-keeping in the flesh.

The constant drumbeat of fulfillment begins in Matthew's birth stories, where, at every step, what happens is portrayed as the fulfillment of Israel's hope.

#### *The virgin shall conceive (1:22-23)*

The first explicit fulfillment in Matthew draws on Isaiah 7:14, which looks ahead to a new ruler coming from the womb of a virgin. Though it is true that the Hebrew word in Isaiah could also mean "young woman," the Jewish translators of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, two hundred years before Jesus, used the Greek word *parthenos*, which means "virgin."

Thus, Mary's virginal conception of Jesus is one more small piece of the large mosaic Matthew is creating.

#### *"Out of Egypt" (2: 13-15)*

When the angel tells Joseph to flee with his family to Egypt, Matthew writes that this was "to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'" The prophet is Hosea and this is a quotation of Hosea 11:1, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."

It's a fair question to ask why Matthew uses this quotation. In the context of Hosea, it is clear that the "son" is Israel, the people of God, whom God rescued from slavery in Egypt. Matthew certainly knows that. So . . . was he merely thumbing through a concordance looking for a verse that incorporated "Egypt" and something like "son," that he could then use to refer to Jesus to bolster his view that Jesus is the fulfillment of numerous OT prophecies? Hardly!

Instead, Matthew places himself firmly within a large stream of NT writings that want us to connect the Exodus from Egypt with the New Exodus in Jesus Christ. This is yet another instance that highlights the importance of reading Scripture for context and

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew uses *genesis* again when he begins his story at 1:18, where it is translated "birth."

connection. Hosea 11:2 goes on to talk about the disobedience of Israel after their rescue from Egypt. This ought to help us see the contrast with Jesus' faithful obedience and the rescue it accomplished.

Mary, Joseph, and Jesus may be refugees fleeing out of Israel to escape a murderous tyrant, but their flight is only the beginning of Israel's redemption from bondage. Mary's baby will grow to be the representative of Israel and all humankind whose faithfulness creates a New Exodus that transcends even God's rescue of Moses and the slaves.

*"A voice was heard in Ramah" (2:16-18)*

The third fulfillment draws our attention to the world's darkness. Here, the massacre of the infants is a fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophet of Jeremiah. The quotation is from Jeremiah 31:15, a woeful lament over the Babylonian exile. Ramah, a town about 5 miles north of Jerusalem, seems to have been a deportation depot for those being shipped into exile (see Jeremiah 40:1). Rachel was the favored wife of Jacob (see Genesis 25-35) and the mother of Joseph and Benjamin.

Here, the connection to Jesus is pretty easy to see. Though the Jews began returning to Jerusalem centuries before, many understood that the exile had never truly ended. Herod's killing of the babies was only the latest reminder that the exile continued. The exile is more than mere geography, for oppressors continue to rule over God's people. Jesus and the salvation he brought would be the true end of exile, which he announces when he begins his ministry in his hometown of Nazareth (see Luke 4). Further driving home Matthew's point, Jeremiah 31 is also where we find the famous New Covenant passage, "The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant . . . I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts . . ." (31:31-34).

*"He will be called a Nazorean" (scene 3, v. 19-23)*

The fourth fulfillment ends with a "quotation" that isn't really a quotation at all! It can't be found anywhere in the Bible or outside the Bible for that matter. When we look at Matthew's words closely, we see that he is going about this one a bit differently than in his other quotations. No specific prophet is named and he uses a plural "prophets," not the singular. He knows that this isn't a specific quote.

Instead, it is probably a wordplay, using the similarity between the Hebrew word for "branch," *neser* and the name of Nazareth. Though it is used only in Isaiah 11:1, "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse and a branch/*neser* shall come out of his roots," *neser* became an important messianic theme among the Jews. The messianic figure of Isaiah 11:1 is the Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14. Thus, Matthew cleverly prepares the reader for the surprising news that the hometown of God's Messiah is Nazareth, a place bereft of all significance. As Nathaniel puts it when being recruited by Philip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Matthew replies, "Most certainly . . . the branch of Jesse!"

### *Fulfillment*

Each of these fulfillment scenes are crafted so as to help us see the larger story that is being played out in the birth of Jesus. In fulfillment of God's promises made long before, the time had finally come for God to break into human history in a new way.

The baby is the long-awaited Messiah and more. The Christ-child is God incarnate who brings the salvation that only God could bring. As Jesus would himself say later, "the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). Gary Burge writes:

When Jesus entered this stage of Judaism's history, the country was rife with political tension. Deep skepticism about resistance held for some; others were ready to find their messianic leader and fight. Jesus' baptism evoked numerous themes in this: he begins his ministry with an act of purification (immersion in the Jordan River), the Spirit anoints him with power, and God's voice echoes the words of Psalm 2—the very

liturgy used for Israel's kings—saying that indeed Jesus is God's chosen son. Jesus emerges from the Jordan just as Joshua had (Jesus' name in Hebrew is Joshua) and he enters the wilderness to defeat Satan. And in Matthew when Jesus begins his ministry he speaks from a mountain (as Moses had). Even the prophet John the Baptist, dressed like the prophet Elijah, is his promoter, announcing that this is indeed someone unparalleled coming into the world (Malachi 4:5; John 1:29). It is no surprise that the theological specialists from Jerusalem come to the Jordan River to investigate (John 1:19-28) and continue to interrogate Jesus later. If this is a fraudulent claim, then it must be judged as such.

The unfolding of Jesus' ministry in each of the Gospels reinforces this same idea. Jesus is the fulfiller of Israel's hope. He is empowered by the Spirit of God to do fabulous miracles and to teach profoundly. This is why Mark begins his Gospel with the words "good news." This term (Gk. euangelion, or "gospel") was a well-known designation for an official announcement. Its use by the Romans was widespread, and here Mark is happy to exploit it. The good news is that the Messiah has come, the hope that had been nurtured for two centuries is now among us, and the redemption of the people is at hand.<sup>2</sup>

Next week, we'll see that this fulfillment is further realized in Jesus' announcement that the kingdom of God was arriving in and through him.

## Scott Engle's Bible Classes

### **Monday Evening Class**

A study of Matthew's Gospel

Meeting on-line at 3pm Monday on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle."

### **Tuesday Lunchtime Class**

A study of Genesis

Meeting on-line at 12:00 noon Tuesday on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle".

*About the weekday classes:*

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like, wear your pj's.-- we're on-line now so who'd even know. Have a Bible handy.

Both classes are now recorded and are available each week in my new podcast at [scottengle.podbean.com](http://scottengle.podbean.com). They are also available on Apple podcasts. Search by my name, "Scott Engle".

### **Scott's Sunday Class**

Meeting on Sunday at 11:00 on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle."

**Videos of all three classes are posted on Scott's YouTube channel.** Search for "Scott Engle." These videos are posted as soon as possible after class.

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<sup>2</sup> Burge, Gary M. *The New Testament in Seven Sentences* (pp. 18-19). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.