

Immanuel, God With Us
Matthew 1:1-25
Key Verse: 1:22-23

by Kevin Albright

Key Verse: 1:23, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel, which means, 'God with us.'"

Merry Christmas! For 17 weeks of 2009, Chicago UBF has studied all 47 chapters of 1-2 Kings. I would like to review the titles and key verses of the 17 lessons. Instead, I will mention a few significant names and empires: Solomon, Jeroboam, David, Elijah, Elisha, Assyria, Hezekiah, Josiah, Babylon. Some kings were wicked and bad examples. A few did right in the eyes of the Lord and were blessed and a blessing. None of the kings, however, had a perfect record. They all needed a Savior. 2 Kings ends on a tragic note with Israel captive in Babylon. After 70 years in Babylonian captivity, they returned to Jerusalem to resettle and rebuild during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. In the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi prophesied, "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come, says the LORD Almighty." (Mal 3:1)

The New Testament expresses the fulfillment of this prophecy in the preaching of John the Baptist and the appearance and ministry of Jesus Christ. Matthew's gospel alone records at least 47 direct references to the Old Testament and over 12 direct fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies. Matthew had been a tax collector and he became one of Jesus' 12 apostles. Clearly, beginning in chapter 1, he wrote to persuade Jewish people to trust in Jesus as the Anointed King, Priest and Prophet, whom God promised to send. But, as we shall see, Jesus is the Savior not only of the Jewish people, but of all peoples on earth.

I. God with his people for 42 generations (1-17)

People can be easily bored to read the Bible when they encounter a list of names as we see in verses 1-17. Who were these people and what do they have to do with you and me? Personally, I don't even know the names of my great-grandparents. But Matthew records 42 generations of children from Abraham all the way to Jesus Christ. It's true that we don't know anything about many of these names. But the Bible includes the stories of many of them. Even to summarize the brief information of what we know about them would take the rest of this message. Rather, I want to point out a few significant highlights.

First, son of Abraham. Who was Abraham? He is the father of the Jewish nation. In fact, his name means "father of many." God called, chose and promised him: "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Gen 12:2-3) This was only partially fulfilled in the nation of Israel. The New Testament declares that this was ultimately and fully fulfilled through Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:8 reads: "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'" And verse 16 says, "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ."

Second, son of David. David was Israel's model king who loved God. David was a small shepherd boy who defeated the giant Goliath with big faith in God. David became Israel's king, after Saul. God chose and anointed David as king through the prophet Samuel. David had it in his heart to build a temple for God. Instead, God promised to build a house and dynasty for David. God promised David in 2 Samuel 7:16, "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever." However, the people of Israel had no king for several hundred years, since the time of the exile to Babylon. Many Jews were hoping for a coming king, a descendant of David. This King would be truly great. Isaiah had prophesied of this coming king: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this." (Isa 9:6-7) Jesus is the promised King. Christian scholars tell us that Matthew's portrait of Jesus is primarily as King.

Third, Jesus Christ. Matthew says in verse 1a, "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ..." Matthew's whole purpose of writing is to talk about Jesus Christ. Is there any greater name than that of Jesus Christ? No, there is not, for his name is above all names. "Jesus Christ is Lord" is the greatest confession that any human can make. I believe we have all made this confession. Please make this confession now: Jesus Christ is Lord. Confessing is not enough. We must also believe in our hearts that he is Lord, and, as we sing every Sunday worship, crown him Lord of all, and Lord of my heart and life. The Bible says, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved..." (Ro 10:9) God exalted Jesus to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Php 2:9-11)

So where did Matthew get his genealogy list? He got it from the Bible books of Ruth (4:18-22) and 1 Chronicles (3:10-17). After Abraham, there was Isaac, Jacob and Judah, whose lives are recorded in some detail in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. They were not perfect men. David is another example. His sin of adultery with Bathsheba is alluded to in verse 6 since Solomon's mother 'had been Uriah's wife.' Still God gave his word and promises to sinners and God worked in and through them. We also are not perfect men. But God wants to work in and through each of us for his glory and good purpose.

How about women? Jewish genealogies listed only men, except when there were no sons. But Matthew mentions several women in Jesus' family tree: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Uriah's wife and Mary, the mother of Jesus. We know these women for their stories are in the Bible. One common feature of these women is that they all had sorrowful life problems. Tamar's first two husbands died. Rahab's town was destined for destruction by God. Ruth's husband died and she lived as a foreigner in Israel. Bathsheba's adultery resulted in the death of her husband and her illegitimate child. Mary was with child before she married Joseph. Some of these women were of questionable reputation. Several were not even Jewish. Still, God included them in his redemptive history leading to Christ. What can we learn here? We learn that God can choose and use any person, man or woman, sinful or righteous. God keeps his promises, even when man is full of mistakes and sins. God is faithful.

This is also expressed in the list of kings in verses 6-12. Most of these kings were wicked men who did evil in the eyes of the Lord. We know this from their stories in Kings and Chronicles. A few of them did a better job, following David's good example. But, as already stated, they too were not perfect, and they could not stop the end result of southern Israel's exile to Babylon.

What about all the nobodies in the family tree of Jesus? We know nothing about them, except that they were descendants of Abraham and David. As far as we are concerned, they are simply names of people who lived. We all want our lives to count and be remembered don't we? We don't want to live as a nobody and be forgotten. If you want to die and be forgotten, please raise your hand. I didn't think so. The good news is that even if we are not remembered in the history books, there is a way we will not be forgotten by God. God wants to include us in his story. History is his-story. We make history when we are included in God's book of life. The real meaning of life is not about us. It is about him who created us, who loves us, who died to save us, and who wants to live in and through us. Let's remember this about the genealogy of Jesus Christ: God was with his people Israel for 42 generations. God is the faithful God who kept his promises and who still keeps his promises.

II. God with us through Jesus Christ (18-25)

Look at verse 18. Matthew introduces an engagement between a woman named Mary and a man named Joseph. They were pledged to be married. In those days, this pledge meant more than today's engagement. It was a public declaration to marry and to reverse it would require a divorce. These two would be used to bring Jesus into the world, with one exception: God did not need a human father to help with this pregnancy. God only needed the virgin Mary to carry and bear this child, since she would conceive through the Holy Spirit. Both Matthew and Luke agree absolutely on this point: Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. In Luke 1:35 the angel Gabriel explained it to Mary more fully: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

So Mary became pregnant by God's power and was carrying the Son of God, Jesus Christ. But there was a problem. Joseph didn't know how she became pregnant. And he surely knew that he wasn't the father! Obviously, Joseph assumed that Mary had been unfaithful to him. After all, it's not every day or once a year that a virgin gets pregnant by the Holy Spirit. So he made a painful decision. Verse 19 says that because he was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. Joseph had the right to publicize Mary's condition and make things difficult and shameful for her. She could have even been stoned for apparent infidelity. However, Joseph did not lash out in anger. Joseph decided to break off his engagement with Mary to please God. Joseph was indeed a God-fearing man.

Look at verses 20-21. 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. 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." Not only did God reveal the truth of Mary's pregnancy to Joseph. God told Joseph to take Mary home as his wife. And he did in obedience to the angel of God, even though that was not easy to do considering her condition. People would misunderstand Joseph. But Joseph obeyed God's direction and took Mary home as his wife. He also had no physical union with her until she gave birth to her son. The angel also told him the name they were to give this child: Jesus.

Jesus is the same as the Hebrew name Joshua. Both of these names mean, "the Lord saves." The angel explained why he was to be given this name: "...because he will save his people from their sins." His name reveals his mission in life. Jesus' mission was not to overthrow the Roman government, nor to eradicate poverty or unemployment. Actually, in this fallen world, there will always be evil governments, poverty, unemployment and diseases. So Jesus did not merely solve these problems for a few people. Then what did Jesus come to do? He came to save his people from their sins.

Who are 'his people'? This was intended to be the whole nation of Israel. But not many Jews believed in him. John 1:11 expresses this tragedy, "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive." But the very next verse in John 1:12 gives an amazing promise: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..." All who receive Jesus and believe in Jesus' name are 'his people.' They are given the right and power to become God's children. They have forgiveness of sins and eternal life in his name. John 3:16 boldly agrees with this: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Why is it that only Jesus can save us from our sins? It is because of who he is the holy and sinless Son of God. How does Jesus save us from our sins? Jesus saves us by what he did on the cross as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (Jn 1:29) In a Gentile soldier's home, Peter declared, "...everyone who believes in [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (Ac 10:43)

What we need more than anything else is the forgiveness of sin. Why? When our sins are forgiven, our relationship with God is fully restored on his terms. Imagine you are estranged from someone and you try to restore the relationship in your own preferred way. You might give them a gift or do something nice for them. But it is important to realize that to restore the relationship you must please the one you have offended and be reconciled on that person's required terms. God requires the forgiveness of sins.

What is sin? That could be answered in many ways. One way to describe sin is that it is anything we have said, thought or done that offends God. You might ask, "Why doesn't God just accept an apology?" God is holy, a holiness we cannot begin to understand or fathom, since we are not inherently holy. His holiness sets him apart from all creation. For example, our bodies eventually die. But God can never die. So he is very different from us, at least from our bodies. God is light, while we are tainted with the darkness of our sins. Sin is bad news for us. Our sins condemn us to live apart from God for eternity. The darkness and sin must be removed. Enter Jesus Christ. This was his mission and he fulfilled it. At his birth, an angel said to shepherds in the field, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." (Lk 2:11) Through his death on the cross, Jesus became good news of great joy for all who trust in him. They are his people and Jesus saves them from their sins. Has Jesus saved you from your sins? How? What sins has he saved you from? Do you have assurance that Jesus saved you from all your sins? If not, please memorize 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." I used to

think that I was a pretty good guy who could save myself. But through the Bible and experience I found that I wasn't a very good guy and I could not save myself from my sins. Jesus saved me from my sins of pride, self-righteousness and lust. I know that only Jesus can save me from all my sins. I newly confess Jesus as my Savior. Come to Jesus Christ our Savior for the forgiveness of all your sins.

The Bible gives many marvelous titles to Jesus. A few of these from John's gospel are: Bread of Life, Light of the World, Good Shepherd, Gate, Resurrection and the Life, The Way, the Truth, and the Life, and the Vine (Jn 6:35; 8:12; 10:9,10; 11:25; 14:6; 15:5). Matthew gives us another title of Jesus.

Let's read verses 22 and 23. "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel'--which means, 'God with us.'" What title is given here? Immanuel. In Hebrew, it is literally: The With Us--God. What does it mean that Jesus is God with us?

Consider this: if someone offends you, isn't it hard to be with them or near them or around them? We want them to go away or we try to escape ourselves and leave their presence. But consider this: did God have anything to gain for himself by reconciling with sinners? Does God need friends? Is God lonely? Did God need to borrow money from us? Then why did he go through all this effort? As an individualistic American it's hard for me to understand, but I think I have an answer from the Bible. Three words from the book of 1 John: God is love. (1Jn 4:16a) 1 John 4:10 says, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

The family is an important unit in every society. Yet if we look at any society, we find relational problems, beginning in the family: divorce, separation, abuse, silent standoffs, infidelity. What causes all this separation and alienation? It is the same thing that separates and alienates us from God: sin. In the Garden of Eden, immediately after Adam sinned, he hid from God. Not only that, he blamed Eve. Sin damaged his relationship with God and with his lovely wife.

One of the key words in the Christian faith is reconciliation. Reconciliation means coming back together or making friends again. It means "to be with." Do you ever feel lonely, even in a crowded room or stadium? Do you ever feel that no one understands you, no one suffers with you, no one is willing to stay with you? I don't know about you, but sometimes I don't even like myself and I would rather not stay with myself! (But I don't have any choice.) But there is one who actually wants to be with us, who chose to be with us, who is always with us. He is Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus promised his disciples (and us) at the end of Matthew's gospel, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew the tax collector was a lonely man. He had money. He had many uppity so-called 'friends.' But he was alone in his sins. One day, Jesus came up to his tax booth and said, "Follow me." No one wanted to be with Matthew. But Jesus was with him, bearing all his sins until he could be healed and become a wonderful gospel writer, St. Matthew. Matthew learned that Jesus came to call sinners, like him. He learned that Jesus is the 'friend of sinners.' What another beautiful title of Jesus: Friend of sinners. We thank and praise Jesus Christ who came to save us from our sins and to be with us. May Jesus Christ be with you now and forever and give you peace and joy. May Jesus Christ heal many broken relationships by his love and mercy and power. Amen. Merry Christmas and a Blessed Year 2010 to you!