

τῆς μετοικεσίας Βαβυλῶνος

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by

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## τῆς μετοικεσίας Βαβυλῶνος

Whether in history books or the front page news, certain people and events rise to the top, coloring and shaping the narrative that follows. Truly, the vibrancy of any story is dependent upon the people and events that either give life to the narrative or threaten to overwhelm it. So too Christian Scripture begins with significant people and history-making events. Certainly one of the most important figures in the Hebrew canon is David, and one of the most significant events in Israel's history is their deportation to Babylon.<sup>1</sup>

The explicitly Davidic emphasis of Matthew's gospel is given great attention in Matthean scholarship, and this is clearly seen in the study of his opening genealogy. David is commonly used to explain the structure of the genealogy,<sup>2</sup> the genealogy's connection with the birth narrative that follows in 1:18-2:23,<sup>3</sup> and the dominant Jewish view of Messianic

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<sup>1</sup>Perhaps the most significant event in Israel's history is the exodus from Egypt, but the more recent Babylonian captivity (which is described with Exodus-like language in the prophets) is perhaps equal to the exodus in the first-century imagination. The primacy of the more recent Babylonian captivity compared with the Exodus event will be more fully developed below.

<sup>2</sup>W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Vol. 1*, (New York: T&T Clark Ltd, 2004), 161-165. Davies and Allison conclude that the most likely explanation for the structure of Matthew 1:1-17 is the Jewish practice of *gematria*, where the numerical value of the three consonants in the name  $\tau \delta \delta$  equals fourteen, 163.

<sup>3</sup>R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 168. D. C. Allison, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 138.

expectation through Judah.<sup>4</sup> This preoccupation with David is understandable since it is clearly important to Matthew's gospel (*cf.* Matthew 1:1, “υιοῦ Δαυὶδ”). However, emphasis upon Davidic sonship in Matthew's genealogy has left the significance of the Babylonian event largely unexplored.<sup>5</sup>

In order to frame this discussion, the meaning and significance of τῆς μετουκείας Βαβυλῶνος, “the exile to Babylon,” must be carefully considered as it relates to the OT and first-century contexts of Matthew's gospel. This narrow focus has implications for the genealogy (Matthew 1:1-17), the prologue (Matthew 1:1-4:22), and the gospel as a whole. The exile event<sup>6</sup> is without question “a clue to the evangelist's eschatological orientation.”<sup>7</sup> But even more than a clue, *Matthew's genealogy of the Messiah, which serves to structure the following narrative and establish the theological emphases of the gospel, has as its foundation not only David but also the often-neglected exile to Babylon.*

After a brief introduction to Matthew's genealogy, I will then consider the OT context of the genealogical division, “the exile to Babylon,” finishing with an explanation for the

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<sup>4</sup>Marshall D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 115ff. Johnson outlines the minority Jewish Messianic expectations through Levi (Aaron) and Ephraim (Joseph) and the majority expectation through Judah (David).

<sup>5</sup>Except for some passing references and undeveloped theological assertions, the second major division of Matthew's genealogy is quickly overlooked. *cf.* Davies and Allison, *Matthew, Vol. 1*, 180.

<sup>6</sup>The terms exile and deportation will be used interchangeably throughout. *cf.* the explanation below: The Meaning and Significance of τῆς μετουκείας Βαβυλῶνος.

<sup>7</sup>Davies and Allison, *Matthew, Vol. 1*, 180.

genealogy in Matthew 1:1-17. I will then explore the implications of my explanation for Matthew's prologue.

### **Matthew's Genealogy of the Messiah**

The fact that *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* begins with a genealogy has bored many to death and brought many scholars to their wit's end. This genealogical *tour de force* is packed with questionable characters and highly-esteemed heroes, men and women, forgettable kings and detestable sons, all of whom provide a fascinating red carpet for the most beloved and rejected person in all of human history.

At the head of the NT canon stands Matthew's witness to Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1). What immediately follows is a genealogy that frames the context for this one "who is called Christ"<sup>8</sup> (Matthew 1:16). This "powerfully evocative title 'Messiah'"<sup>9</sup> immediately sets the context for Matthew's genealogy of Jesus,<sup>10</sup> "the long-awaited deliverer of God's people."<sup>11</sup> He is not a mere "historical figure (Jesus of Nazareth)"<sup>12</sup> and this

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<sup>8</sup>"Christ," i.e. "Messiah." R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 25.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>10</sup>"The unusual practice here of entitling a genealogy according to the name of the last descendant serves to subordinate the forefathers to this last descendant and indicates that they gain their meaning and identity from the final progeny, i.e., from Christ." David R. Bauer, *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies; The Literary and Theological Function of the Genealogy in Matthew's Gospel*, (Ann Arbor: Scholars Press, 1996), 140.

<sup>11</sup>France, *Matthew*, 35.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 25.

emphasis is clear by Matthew's comparatively large number of uses of the title.<sup>13</sup> Matthew's peculiar emphasis upon this one from the tribe of Judah frames this genealogy with Jesus' redemptive work out of exile<sup>14</sup> as the cornerstone.<sup>15</sup>

### A Survey of Structures

On the surface, the structure of genealogy in Matthew 1:1-17 is plain. Verse 17 explicitly structures the genealogy with three sets of fourteen around the dually important king David and exile event, both of which lead to the one who is called Christ.<sup>16</sup> Many explanations for this threefold structure have been proposed.<sup>17</sup> Allison concludes that the Jewish practice of *gematria* is "key to the pattern of Matthew's genealogy" and one "would not readily take it to be a theological statement."<sup>18</sup> France concludes that the whole of Matthew 1, including the genealogy, primarily serves to establish Jesus' "legal claim" to the role of the Davidic Messiah.<sup>19</sup> Hood, focusing on the annotations in the genealogy in order to explain Matthew's theological

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<sup>13</sup>"The title Χριστός appears sixteen times in Matt. (compared to seven times in Mark and twelve in Luke)." Richard E. Menninger, *Israel and the church in the Gospel of Matthew*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1994), 82.

<sup>14</sup>Jesus is the royal Messiah for returned exiles. France, *Matthew*, 39.

<sup>15</sup>For further discussion of the title "Messiah": cf. France, *MET*, 281-283; Menninger, *Israel*, 82ff; Davies and Allison, *Matthew, Vol. 1*, 149-160; France, *Matthew*, 25-35. For discussion of Messianic expectation from Judah: Johnson, *Genealogies*, 115ff;

<sup>16</sup>France, *MET*, 168; France, *Matthew*, 29.

<sup>17</sup>For a survey of explanations see Davies and Allison, *Matthew, Vol. 1*, 161-165; Lance T. Beauchamp, *History Driving Theology: A Literary, Theological, and Historical Analysis of the Matthean Birth Narratives*, (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 97-100.

<sup>18</sup>Davies and Allison, *Matthew, Vol. 1*, 165; *Vol. 3*, 706. also Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 59-60.

<sup>19</sup>France, *MET*, 168-169.

emphasis, concludes that “the genealogy is an affirmation of the royal vocation of Jesus in light of Israel’s story.”<sup>20</sup> The first major division with emphasis upon the Davidic sonship of Jesus has overshadowed the second major division in explanation of the structure.

Moving toward an explanation that accounts equally for the exile event as well as Jesus’ Davidic sonship, Bauer proposes a chiasmic structure of the genealogy based upon verse 1.<sup>21</sup> The threefold introduction of Christ, Son of David, and Son of Abraham in verse 1 is then reversed in the major divisions of the genealogy (Abraham, v. 2; David, v. 6; Christ, v. 16). Bauer concludes that this structure gives priority to the title Christ,<sup>22</sup> which establishes that the genealogy is primarily concerned with Messianic deliverance. Bauer’s explanation is keen, and it introduces and dovetails nicely with the proposed genealogical structure below. Before that, however, it is necessary to first explore the significance of “the exile to Babylon,” with particular attention given to the OT context of this formative event.

### **The Often-Neglected Division<sup>23</sup>**

In the midst of Matthew’s collection of names is the mention of one event, the exile to Babylon (Matthew 1:11, 12, 17), which stands at the forefront of the first-century mind.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps it is the obvious significance of the event that has left its meaning largely unexplored. Or

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<sup>20</sup>Jason B. Hood, *The Messiah, His Brothers, and the Nations*, (New York: T&T Clark International, 2011), 70.

<sup>21</sup>Bauer, *Treasures*, 141. *cf* Mervyn Eloff, “Exile, Restoration and Matthew’s Genealogy of Jesus ‘Ο ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ’”, (Neotestamentica 38, 2004), 77.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 141-142.

<sup>23</sup>Eloff speaks of the “largely ignored” “third epoch in the genealogy.” Eloff, *Exile*, 83.

<sup>24</sup>N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 159, 268, 446.

perhaps it is because of the wide-ranging depth of meaning surrounding this phrase that its depths are not mined. Whatever the explanation, this significant event in Israel's history is more than a convenient structural marker for Matthew's obsession with threes.

μετουκείας, commonly translated as “deportation,” is a NT *hapax legomenon*, occurring 4 times in the genealogy (Matthew 1:11, 12, 17)<sup>25</sup> and 7 times in the LXX, each time translating the Hebrew word גּוֹלָה (golah, “exile”). Other similar cousins of this noun occur in the NT that reference deportation (Acts 7:4, 43, “μετουκίζω”). However, the “awkward Greek usage” displayed here in the genealogy betrays Matthew's dependence upon the narrative of Israel.<sup>26</sup>

While μετουκείας by itself gives many helpful clues into the gospel writer's intention, the complete phrase, τῆς μετουκείας Βαβυλῶνος, provokes the biblical imagination beyond comparison. Alongside Egypt in the OT, the city of Babylon has long stood as the citadel of rebellion against God. From the towering arrogance of Babel in Genesis 11 to the self-centered rulers who have sat on the throne of this earth (*cf.* Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 1-4), Babylon wreaks with the stench of impending divine judgment.<sup>27</sup>

In Matthew's genealogy, kings such as Ahaz (Isaiah 7-8) and Hezekiah (Isaiah 37-39), who are mentioned before the exile division, remind the reader of the failure of the Davidic kings that led to the deportation (Isaiah 39). It is from the stump of these failed kings (Isaiah 11:1ff)

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<sup>25</sup>Davies and Allison, *Matthew, Vol. 1*, 179.

<sup>26</sup>Johnson, *Genealogies*, 216.

<sup>27</sup>Bauer, *Treasures*, 146.

that the “true Davidide” will come and deliver his exiled people.<sup>28</sup> The exile event in Babylon ignites the OT imagination and serves as the intertextual foundation that Matthew builds his narrative upon. The books of Isaiah and Chronicles secure this imaginative link.

### **Isaiah and Matthew**

The book of Isaiah’s influence upon the NT has been widely acknowledged and explored. Specific to Matthew’s account, the famous formula quotations of Matthew 1-2 begin with Isaiah (Matthew 1:23, Isaiah 7:14), the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist fulfills the prophetic witness (Matthew 3:3, Isaiah 40:3), and the quotation of Isaiah 9:1 concludes Matthew’s prologue in Matthew 4:15-16. These quotations and many other allusions<sup>29</sup> to Isaiah in the beginning of Matthew’s gospel explicitly invite the reader to understand this text with this prophet “that came before” (Matthew 5:12). This intertextual link provides the first fruits for interpretation of this essential Matthean phrase, τῆς μετοικεσίας Βαβυλῶνος.

We are introduced to Babylon in Isaiah 13 with a declaration of judgment upon her, “the glory of kingdoms” (Isaiah 13:19). “The wilderness of the sea” (Isaiah 21:1), Babylon, will be “shattered to the ground” (Isaiah 21:9). But before this destruction comes upon the great city of men, Israel is taken away to Babylon (Isaiah 39), but not without hope of a future deliverance

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<sup>28</sup>Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, USA, 2003), 175. *cf.* the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar was cut off (Daniel 4:14-15, 26). Like the True Israel, Nebuchadnezzar was driven to a wilderness-like place (Daniel 4:32-33), and was later restored (Daniel 4:34-37). Matthew’s gospel clearly echoes the exile.

<sup>29</sup>The NA27 margin references have 9 allusions to Isaiah in the first four chapters (Matthew 1:24, 2:10, 2:11, 2:23, 3:16, 3:17, 4:5, 4:7, 4:16) not including the quotations mentioned above.

from this “wilderness” (Isaiah 35:1ff). The second half of Isaiah’s prophecy is devoted to this eschatological deliverance.

Isaiah 40:3 (which is fulfilled in Matthew 3:3) speaks of a “highway” from the “wilderness” of exile.<sup>30</sup> The wilderness will one day become an abundantly fruitful land (Isaiah 41:18-20) but not until “the Holy One of Israel” is sent to “Babylon” to “make a way in the wilderness” (Isaiah 43:14, 19). This Servant of the Lord will “bring back the preserved of Israel” to be “as a light for the nations” (Isaiah 49:6). This restoration will restore the desert of Eden to a garden (Isaiah 51:3) but not before the “holy cities [Zion, Jerusalem] have become a wilderness” (Isaiah 64:10). Flowing from the “‘crucial event’ of the Exodus” in Israel’s sacred history, Isaiah depicts an eschatological vision for the final consummation of deliverance.<sup>31</sup> Clearly the deportation to Babylon is set forth in Exodus-like language in Isaiah’s vision.<sup>32</sup> In the same way, Matthew’s gospel springs forth from the rich soil of Isaiah’s eschatological witness, borrowing the language of the Babylonian exile.

The influence of Isaiah’s prophecy in Matthew is clear. However, in the genealogy of Matthew 1:1-17, the book of Chronicles takes center stage with the cast of prophets providing the eschatological harmonies that complete the chorus.

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<sup>30</sup>Anderson makes a compelling case for parallel poetic structures (Isaiah 40:3-43:21 and 48:20-55:13) of the “highway in the wilderness” (Isaiah 40:3) and the exodus “from Babylon” (Isaiah 48:20). Bernard W. Anderson, *Israel’s Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 181-182.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 189.

<sup>32</sup>J. Gerald Janzen, *Exodus*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 59.

## Chronicles and Matthew

Foundational to Matthew is the rich tradition of genealogies in the OT, climaxing with Chronicles at the end of the Hebrew canon. Marshall D. Johnson's book, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus*, deserves closer consideration in order to better understand Matthew's Messianic opening.

Johnson's central concern is to establish that biblical genealogies are profoundly theological and serve to highlight major themes of the surrounding narratives. In the case of the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 1-9, it begins with Adam and Abraham (1 Chr. 1:1, 1 Chr. 1:28), then traces the Davidic line through the royal tribe of Judah (1 Chr. 4:1), the priestly tribe of Levi (1 Chr. 6:1), and ends with the exile to Babylon (1 Chr. 9:1).<sup>33</sup> These structural markers, along with interpretive annotations and allusions, highlight important themes for the Chronicler, such as temple worship and Davidic deliverance from exile, which are then given further attention in the rest of the book.<sup>34</sup> There is a "literary interdependence" between the genealogy and the narrative.<sup>35</sup>

The genealogical list begins with Adam (1 Chr. 1:1), signaling the Chronicler's "ambition to tell the world's story from the beginning."<sup>36</sup> By starting with Adam and his

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<sup>33</sup>Marshall D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 190. cf Scott W. Hahn, *The Kingdom of God as Liturgical Empire: A Theological Commentary on 1-2 Chronicles*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 18-19.

<sup>34</sup>Johnson, *Genealogies*, 41. John Sailhamer, *First and Second Chronicles*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), Location 406 of 1893, Kindle Edition. For structure: Dempster, *Dominion*, 225)

<sup>35</sup>Johnson, *Genealogies*, 47.

<sup>36</sup>Hahn, *Kingdom of God*, 1.

descendants (1 Chr. 1:1ff, *cf* Genesis 5), along with the descendants of Noah (1 Chr. 1:8ff, *cf* Genesis 10) and of Abraham (1 Chr. 1:28ff), and carrying them through to the kingdom of David (1 Chr. 2:1ff), the Chronicler establishes a central theme of his genealogical introduction: “the promised salvation and blessing... in Genesis 3:15” was to come through the “seed” of the woman, crushing the head of the serpent.<sup>37</sup> Before Israel is even mentioned in 1 Chronicles 1:34, the Chronicler includes the “seventy or seventy-two nations listed in 1 Chronicles 1:5-23,” establishing the messianic purpose of God for “all the known peoples of the world,” not simply the nation of Israel.<sup>38</sup> The covenant with Abraham, alluded to in 1 Chronicles 1:27 with the phrase “Abram, that is Abraham,” interprets the history of Israel, from Genesis through Kings, in light of this greater covenant for the whole world.<sup>39</sup> In Ezra and Nehemiah there is “strong polemic against intermarriage”, but the “royal line” of David in Chronicles includes intermarriage with Canaanites with no comment (1 Chr. 4:1ff) and “hence tacit approval,” showing that blood purity and birth order are not central to God’s redemptive purposes. Indeed all of these details conclude that “restoration is not for Israel alone.”<sup>40</sup>

Another important detail of the Chronicler’s interpretation of Israel’s history is the “removal” of Moses from the genealogy. For the sake of balance, it must be stated that the “exodus and Sinai experience is so fundamental to Israel’s self-identity that it hardly needs explicit mention by the Chronicler.”<sup>41</sup> However, the exclusion of Moses is important, and it

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<sup>37</sup>Sailhamer, *Chronicles*, 378.

<sup>38</sup>Hahn, *Kingdom of God*, 27.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 24, *cf* 20.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 34. *cf* 37, 39.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

highlights the Chronicler's emphasis upon David and the exile, which is "entirely consistent with what we find in the narrative."<sup>42</sup> "Perhaps the Chronicler feels that at this stage in Israel's history, after the ordeal of the exile, the people need to return to... Eden and Moriah."<sup>43</sup> Rather than emphasize the nation of Israel, established at Sinai, the genealogy narrows the "world's family tree into a single branch-the line of the family of David."<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the "typological key" for the Chronicler is the kingdom of David.<sup>45</sup> The period of the exile had a narrowing effect upon the nation of Israel, further calcifying and separating the people from the surrounding peoples. The Chronicler's prophetic intention is to direct the people of God back to the promise given to Abraham, blessing all the nations, thus framing return from exile with the cosmic messianic intentions of Genesis 3:15 in the background.

Furthermore, the genealogical lists highlight the dual roles of the messianic deliverer from the house of David. By highlighting the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Levi, the Chronicler shows the Davidic Messiah to be both a royal and priestly figure. Adam's charge to "fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over" the earth (Genesis 1:28) is a royal understanding of Adam's vocation. Adam was charged to "till and keep" the land (Genesis 2:15), and this same language is used elsewhere of the Levitical priests function in the temple (1 Chr. 9:19). This dual function of the Davidic Messiah mirrors the Adamic prerogatives, all of which culminate in deliverance from exile at the end of the genealogy (1 Chr. 9:1). This deliverance is not merely a

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<sup>42</sup>Johnson, *Genealogies*, 54.

<sup>43</sup>Hahn, *Kingdom of God*, 32. cf 19.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 8.

return of the nation of Israel from Babylon, but is a recovery of the ideal lost in the fall of humanity.<sup>46</sup> God intends to reestablish his reign over all creation with return from exile.

The Chronicler has “expressed in genealogical form many of the theological and nationalistic concepts that are so prominent in his narrative.”<sup>47</sup> This “second picture of Israel’s history” reflects a “fuller appreciation” of God’s messianic purpose for all people.<sup>48</sup>

**The Messianic Meaning of Chronicles.** The book of Chronicles as a whole is “messianic.”<sup>49</sup> The book leans forward into the hope of a coming king, who will rule over all creation. The genealogy points to the house of David, but at the end of the book a Persian king is on the throne.

1 Chronicles 1-9 highlights the covenant purposes of God through Adam, Noah, Abraham, and finally through fulfillment in David.<sup>50</sup> However, the narrative of Chronicles is primarily concerned with David (1 Chr. 11:1-29:22) and Solomon (1 Chr. 29:23-2 Chr. 9:31), with the rest of the Davidic kings (2 Chr. 10:1-35:27), bookended by Adam and Cyrus.<sup>51</sup> The Davidic line ceases with Josiah (2 Chr. 35), and therefore it seems that the messianic deliverance will not come. Further emphasis upon the kingdom of David in the narrative is seen in the covenant purposes of God at Moriah and Sinai being interpreted as culminating in David (2 Chr. 13:5, *cf* 2 Chr. 5:10). This fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants serve as the

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 23-27. *cf* 34.

<sup>47</sup>Johnson, *Genealogies*, 74.

<sup>48</sup>Sailhamer, *Chronicles*, 81.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>50</sup>Hahn, *Kingdom of God*, 18.

<sup>51</sup>Sailhamer, *Chronicles*, 183-184.

“typological substructure for the history that unfolds in the Chronicler’s work.”<sup>52</sup> “Yet, in contrast to the other historical works in the canon where the Mosaic covenant is dominant,” the Abrahamic covenant takes priority for the Chronicler, underlining the foundational nature of the promise to Abraham.<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, the “Chronicler’s homiletic intent is to remind the people of God’s plan,” and this is word of “divine assurance,” not only for Israel, but for all of creation.<sup>54</sup>

The intertextual link between Chronicles and Matthew is secure. Indeed, “The lengthy genealogies with which Chronicles begins make it like no other book in the Tanakh, with the exception of Genesis. In the latter book, the genealogies are not clustered together but are used to structure the narrative.”<sup>55</sup> Like the Chronicler, Matthew is not primarily concerned with a clear-cut and pure ancestry. Rather, he structures his genealogy and book around the universal Abrahamic covenant and the Messiah from the line of David, whom will deliver all of creation from exile.

If the messianic deliverance of the Chronicler is not simply for a nation but for all of creation, then it follows that the return from exile decreed by Cyrus in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 for the people of Israel did not fulfill this worldwide expectation. Certainly, Cyrus was understood as a means by which God delivered his covenant people from Babylon, and this could be clearly

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<sup>52</sup>Hahn, *Kingdom of God*, 5.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 13, 3.

<sup>55</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 225.

seen through the prophet Isaiah.<sup>56</sup> However, the people of Israel still hoped for a final return.

### **The Exile Event and First-Century Expectation<sup>57</sup>**

Although the Jewish people had largely returned to the rebuilt city of Jerusalem, they recognized clearly that the lofty eschatological restoration and deliverance described by Isaiah had not yet been fulfilled.<sup>58</sup> They still anticipated a future and final “return from exile.”<sup>59</sup> This continuing “time of crisis” was the chief threat to “national identity” among first century Jews,

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<sup>56</sup>Antti Laato, *The Servant of YHWH and Cyrus: A Reinterpretation of the Exilic Messianic Programme in Isaiah 40-55*, (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1992). Laato shows that the hope for a Davidic Messiah was largely crushed among the people of Israel since Josiah’s death at Megiddo (2 Chr. 35). Presupposing much of his prior work on Josiah and the messianic program, he argues that at the time of the composition of Isaiah 40-55 there was no suitable royal candidate for deliverance, therefore the messianic expectation of the OT was reinterpreted to show Cyrus as the unexpected messianic deliverer of Israel (223). Several messianic themes, chiefly the “new exodus” and “suffering and vicarious death” (225-226) have been reinterpreted in Isaiah 40-55 as referring to the suffering Davidic dynasty, corporate Israel (234). The return to Judah is the reinterpreted messianic hope of Israel that is fulfilled by the Persian king, Cyrus (244).

<sup>57</sup>Much scholarship today is devoted to the first-century mind, the Greco-Roman context of the NT documents, and the Second Temple Jewish influence on Jesus and the NT writers. This emphasis is no more clear than in the excellent and valuable work of N.T. Wright. While seeking to avoid the pitfall of reading historical information into the text of Matthew (as opposed to reading the canonical influence of books like Isaiah into Matthew), there is still much value that can be discerned from study of the historical context. My sympathies to narrative critics notwithstanding, it must be acknowledged that “although the narrative world of the Gospel is self-consistent and distinct from the external world of historical events and persons, it is not hermetically sealed from the external world.” Bauer, *Treasures*, 132.

<sup>58</sup>G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 173.

<sup>59</sup>Wright, *NT People*, 159, cf. 262.

who desired above all else the “preservation of one’s full standing within the nation.”<sup>60</sup> The mere mention of the deportation to Babylon would surely invoke this crisis context. Furthermore, early Christians understood that Jesus brought them out of exile at his resurrection.<sup>61</sup> But just like the Jewish people of the first century, they still longed for a coming future deliverance. They desired a city to belong to, and first-century Jerusalem was clearly not enough.<sup>62</sup>

The LXX foundation of Matthew’s writing, the prophetic witness of Isaiah, the genealogical and theological emphases of the Chronicler, as well as the first-century imagination altogether provide the fertile soil in which Matthew’s phrase, τῆς μετοικεσίας Βαβυλῶνος, grows. The profoundly theological Matthew 1:1-17 provides the eschatological context for this phrase, climaxing in the “epoch of redemption” in Jesus Christ that must first pass through the “epoch of the exile.”<sup>63</sup>

### **The Eschatological Structure of Matthew 1:1-17**

“Matthew’s text has a profound eschatological dimension.”<sup>64</sup> This fact is widely acknowledged in Matthean scholarship and general devotional reading of Matthew alike. The clearly eschatological ending to the gospel is firmly established from the very first page. With the

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<sup>60</sup>Johnson, *Genealogies*, 87-89. cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew, Vol. 1*, 187. “Throughout Israel’s history these promises often seemed to be in jeopardy, as at the Babylonian captivity.”

<sup>61</sup>Wright, *NT People*, 446.

<sup>62</sup>Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 129.

<sup>63</sup>Davies and Allison, *Matthew, Vol. 1*, 187.

<sup>64</sup>D. C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 196.

“eschatological perspective”<sup>65</sup> of Isaiah in mind, along with the stylistic and theological emphases of the Chronicler, the gospel writer has structured the genealogy of Messiah with the exile event as the climactic turning point of Israel’s history, which has now become the high point of Matthew’s narrative.

Just as Isaiah reinterpreted Israel’s sacred history eschatologically (“supplemented with the theology of the Davidic tradition”),<sup>66</sup> the *telos* of Matthew’s genealogy is eschatological,<sup>67</sup> building upon the Chronicler’s exilic structure in order to highlight Jesus as the Messiah of the still-exiled people of God. Bauer finds the climax of the genealogical structure in verse 16, with the one “who is called Christ.”<sup>68</sup> Certainly this ending serves to frame Jesus as the overall focus of the genealogy and the gospel. However, the title *Christ*, as more than just a bookend, serves to highlight the redemption-needing division of the genealogy, τῆς μετοικεσίας Βαβυλῶνος in verses 11 and 12. The concluding emphasis on the title in verses 16 and 17 reiterate Jesus as the eschatological Deliverer from Babylon.

This emphasis upon the exile event within the structure of the genealogy is further highlighted by the phrase “*and his brothers*” in verses 2 and 11.<sup>69</sup> Hood, contra Nolan, Gundry, Eloff, Schnider, and Stenger, concludes that this annotation alludes “to the servant-like vocation as exercised by Judah and Jechoniah,” and does not think that the corporate interpretation (Israel)

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<sup>65</sup>Anderson, *Typology in Isaiah*, 184.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 182-184.

<sup>67</sup>Johnson, *Genealogies*, 208.

<sup>68</sup>Bauer, *Treasures*, 141.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 144-146. *cf.* Hood, *Messiah*, 63-87. Eloff, *Exile*, 82-83.

accounts for these figures enough, although he concedes it “may well be valid.”<sup>70</sup> With Nolan, Gundry, et al., Bauer explains the corporate failure of Israel in verses 2 and 11 with the genealogical focus on the exile event. Bauer observes:

The promise and privilege granted to the people as a whole in v. 2 had turned sour, because the people of Israel rejected God’s will and purpose which were inherent in their election as the people of God... The only event Matthew mentions in the genealogy is the Deportation to Babylon, for, as far as he is concerned, this event most accurately depicts the essential character of Israel’s history... The Deportation thus points both to the failure of the nation to fulfill its role as son of Abraham and to the failure of the Davidic kings to fulfill their role as sons of David. Failure in both of these areas points ahead to Jesus, who as the Christ fills up all that was lacking in Israel’s history.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, the deportation to Babylon is the high point of the genealogical structure. The exile event explains Matthew’s peculiar emphasis upon the title Messiah, Jesus’ fulfillment of the inclusive promises to Abraham, and his royal Davidic lineage. Ultimately, these three fourteens establish that “history is in order; the time is fulfilled; the Messiah has come.”<sup>72</sup> Johnson concludes:

[Matthew’s] genealogy has become a means of structuring history which finds its closest parallels in similar schemes that appear in the apocalyptic literature. This structure serves to communicate the author’s deep sense of eschatological fulfillment: all prior history was ordered to lead up to the culminating event in Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>73</sup>

At the end of the Hebrew canon “it seems as if Babylon has the last word.”<sup>74</sup>

Thankfully Matthew’s gospel along with the complete NT witness have the last word concerning

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<sup>70</sup>Hood, *Messiah*, 65, 82.

<sup>71</sup>Bauer, *Treasures*, 145-146. Eloff similarly concludes: “... by locating the focal point of this third and final epoch upon τοῦ Χριστοῦ, Matthew is stating that the problem of the exile and the consequent non-fulfillment of the promises to the Patriarchs, to David, and thus for Israel, are only finally resolved with the coming of Jesus.” Eloff, *Exile*, 83.

<sup>72</sup>Johnson, *Genealogies*, 208.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 254.

<sup>74</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 226.

Babylon. If indeed the genealogy of Matthew serves to structure the narrative that follows, then Abraham, David, and the exile to Babylon should color the narrative.

### **Implications of the Genealogy for Matthew's Prologue**

The OT tradition surveyed thus far as well as the eschatological structure of Matthew's genealogy together provide a helpful context for unifying the structure of Matthew's prologue. Much attention has been given to the exposition of Matthew chapters 1 and 2 to develop the themes of Davidic sonship, Messiah,<sup>75</sup> and Jesus as the new Moses.<sup>76</sup> Although all of Matthew 1:1-4:11 introduces the Messiah, France effectively ends the prologue in 2:23.<sup>77</sup> Allison discusses the structure of the prologue in many places, but, with France, does not directly connect the theology of the genealogy with the rest of the prologue, except for the Davidic development in chapters 1 and 2. Matthew 1:1-4:22 as an extended introduction is all "background," but the introduction to Jesus with the genealogy effectively ends at 2:23.<sup>78</sup> As it has been argued above, the genealogies of Scripture serve to shape the following narrative and establish important

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<sup>75</sup>France, *Matthew*, 40-95, France, *MET*, 166-205.

<sup>76</sup>Allison, *The New Moses*.

<sup>77</sup>France, *MET*, 168.

<sup>78</sup>For Exodus/Moses see Davies and Allison, *Matthew, Vol. 1*, 193-195. *cf.* Allison, *Studies*, 138. Allison does include minimal development of *who* Jesus was from the John the Baptist and ministry preparation narratives in chapters 3 and 4. *cf.* Peter Leithart, *Jesus as Israel: The Typological Structure of Matthew's Gospel*, ([www.leithart.com](http://www.leithart.com)), 9-12. Leithart interacts with Allison's new Moses emphasis, and giving what seems to be a more helpful understanding of Jesus as Israel.

theological emphases. In fact, the major divisions of the genealogy in Matthew 1:1-17 are given further exposition in Matthew's prologue.<sup>79</sup>

### **The Genealogical Structure of Matthew 1:1-4:22**

The first major division of Matthew's genealogy, namely "*David the king*" in Matthew 1:6, is given great attention in 1:18-2:23. The birth of Jesus is introduced with Joseph as "son of David" (Matthew 1:20).<sup>80</sup> Chapter 2 contrasts the humble "king of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2) born in Bethlehem to the arrogant king Herod in Jerusalem. Many other theological connections and allusions have been made in chapter 2,<sup>81</sup> but at the very least the repetition of king language throughout chapters 1 and 2 helps to establish the Davidic theme in Matthew's gospel. Another important theme, Gentile inclusion, is hinted at in the genealogy and further developed in Matthew 3.

The ministry of John the Baptist as the last prophet before Messiah is highlighted with a fascinating interaction between the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew 3:1-12. John addresses these Jewish leaders as a "*brood of vipers*," literally the "*offspring of snakes*" (γεννήματα ἔχιδνῶν), using the same root word, γεννάω, as in the genealogy.

Furthermore, John highlights God's proclivity to "*cut down*" wicked men who depend upon

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<sup>79</sup>Bauer and Kingsbury recognize the dual purpose of Matthew 1:1 in introducing both the genealogy and the prologue, although the ending to the prologue is not clearly established (4:11 [France], 4:16 [Bauer/Kingsbury], or 4:22 [Davies and Allison]). Even with an acknowledged prologue of 1:1 through 4:16, Bauer still sees the declaration of Jesus as the Son of God in 3:17 as the culmination! Bauer, *Treasures*, 138-139.

<sup>80</sup>Johnson, *Genealogies*, 218.

<sup>81</sup>Pennington notes the inclusion of the Gentile magi echoes Daniel and the Babylonian exile. Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2009), 289. The exodus and Egypt parallel is made explicit in Matthew 2:15 (*cf.* Hosea 11:1).

blood purity and inheritance rather than mercy (Matthew 3:10, *cf.* Isaiah 11:1, Daniel 4:14-15, 26). These teachers apparently claimed Abraham as their father (Matthew 3:9) in order to justify themselves. First-century Jewish thought, which has been surveyed more fully above, revered genealogies as the primary means of establishing their pure status as “‘sons of Abraham’ and therefore the true heirs of God’s promises to the patriarchs.”<sup>82</sup> Matthew’s genealogy is unconcerned with blood purity,<sup>83</sup> and along with Matthew 3 firmly establishes true sonship from Abraham for *all people*, even “stones” (Matthew 3:9).<sup>84</sup> The focus on Abraham and Gentile inclusion, introduced in the genealogy and developed in Matthew 3, ends climactically with eschatological separation (Matthew 3:12)! Surely the genealogical structure is in view in chapter 3. The prologue then ends in Matthew 4, like the genealogy, with the eschatological thundering of the exile event.

**Babylon, Wilderness, and the Triumph of Christ.** The climactic eschatological narrative in chapter 4 develops the theological purpose of the final division of the genealogy, τῆς μετοικεσίας Βαβυλῶνος.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Johnson, *Genealogies*, 44.

<sup>83</sup>The mention of Gentiles (especially Gentile women!) would not have passed the first-century Rabbinic genealogy purity test! *cf.* France, *MET*, 233.

<sup>84</sup>Johnson, *Genealogies*, 219. Further, “Gentiles will share in the eschatological banquet with the Hebrew patriarchs while ‘the sons of the kingdom’ will be judged (8:10-12)”

<sup>85</sup>The dramatic narratives of chapters 1 through 3 involve a wicked king, an assassination plot, the slaughter of many children, a flight to Egypt, a wild confrontation between arrogant teachers and a hairy prophet, and a miraculous Trinitarian baptism with the clouds parting and God speaking. However, all of these narratives pale in comparison to the three round bout between the god of the earth and the chosen Son of God, which moves from barren landscapes to the height of temple to the highest mountain overlooking all the kingdoms of the world.

Alongside the survey of Isaiah above, the wilderness/Babylon scene of Revelation 17-18 parallels the wilderness/Babylon account in Matthew 4. Matthew begins with Jesus being “led up by the Spirit into the wilderness,” just as John is carried away “in the Spirit into a wilderness” when he sees the final destruction of Babylon (Revelation 17:3, *cf.* Babylon as “the wilderness of the sea” in Isaiah 21:1). Beale, references later Jewish writings that interpreted Isaiah 21:1 “as the place from which ‘the viper and flying serpent’ would come against Israel.”<sup>86</sup> Matthew 4 inaugurates this eschatological battle between the serpent (king of Babylon) and Israel (the Lamb from the “great and high mountain”, Revelation 21:9-10).

Although Luke concludes his account of the temptation narrative at the temple (Luke 4:1-13), Matthew’s climactic temptation is the devil’s offer of “all the kingdoms of the world” (Matthew 4:8). Furthermore, this third temptation is on a “very high mountain” (Luke omits “mountain”; *cf.* Nebuchadnezzar overlooking his kingdom “on the roof”, Daniel 4:29). The “kings of the earth” (Revelation 17:2) are “the rulers who associate themselves with Babylon and the beast in opposition to God’s kingdom.”<sup>87</sup> Jesus, recognizing the deception of Satan in the wilderness, knows that kingdoms of the earth are already his footstool and are not truly Satan’s to give. The Messianic King does not fall for the alluring<sup>88</sup> riches of the “great prostitute” Babylon (Revelation 17:4-5, *cf.* Daniel 4:19 LXX), making them into “a god” to “fall down and worship” (Isaiah 46:6, Matthew 4:9). In the end of Matthew’s temptation narrative and finally at the consummation of all things, “Babylon will be turned from majestic city back into uninhabited

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<sup>86</sup>G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 851. “... and from which the beastly kingdoms of Dan. 7:3 would arise to oppose Israel.”

<sup>87</sup>Bauckham, *Revelation*, 138.

<sup>88</sup>Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation*, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2001), 247.

wilderness, ‘a dwelling place of demons... and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird’ ([Revelation] 18:2)” (Isaiah 13, Matthew 4:16).<sup>89</sup>

### **The Significance for Matthew**

The genealogy of Matthew 1:1-17 is truly “theological” and not only shapes the prologue of Matthew’s gospel, but in significant ways shapes the whole gospel and the theology of the early church.<sup>90</sup> Many of the major theological themes of Matthew that are established in the genealogy have been developed at length by scholars. The proposed high point of the genealogy, τῆς μετοικεσίας Βαβυλῶνος, has been thoroughly explored by N. T. Wright.<sup>91</sup> Goulder proposes that the three fourteens of the genealogy “foreshadow Jesus’ mission.” The third theme is the fulfilling of the exile event, “which dominates the end of the Gospel.”<sup>92</sup> The ministry of Jesus is the “decisive event of eschatological history,” and the genealogy, prologue, and gospel as a whole serve to underline this central redemptive purpose.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 244.

<sup>90</sup>Bauer, *Treasures*, 129-130.

<sup>91</sup>Wright, *NT People*, 387, 406. Extensively in N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). cf. Leithart, *Jesus as Israel*, 12, 15, 34-37. “Jesus is subjected to the Gentile power, as Israel was to the Babylonians, and on the cross He cries out that He has been forsaken even by His God (27:46). As N. T. Wright has argued on other grounds, on the cross Jesus suffers the curse of Israel’s, and humanity’s, exile, in order to bear that curse away and return humanity to the presence of God. If the death and burial of Jesus is the exile of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus is His return from exile.”

<sup>92</sup>M. D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew*, (London: Holy Trinity Church, 1974), 233.

<sup>93</sup>Johnson, *Genealogies*, 220-221.

## Conclusion

The biblical genealogies and Matthew's genealogy in particular "are closely attached to their contexts and to the narrative in which they occur in regard to language, structure, and theology."<sup>94</sup> No place is this connection more significant than with the exile event, which is the turning point of the genealogy, the climactic event of the prologue, and even the gospel as a whole. The exiled people of God throughout every age are broken and oppressed by antichrist, and Matthew's messianic vision gives life for weary souls, who look not to the walls of seductive Babylon for security, but who find their security in the meek and merciful Christ. "For the Lord comforts Zion; he comforts all her waste places; and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord" (Isaiah 51:3).

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 253.

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