

Joseph and the Birth of Isaac in Matthew 1

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The Matthean genealogy of Jesus (1:1-17) unambiguously presents Jesus—with equal emphasis—as Son of Abraham and Son of David, and of course as Messiah. The messianic Son-of-David theme is carried out explicitly in the accompanying pericope devoted to both the annunciation to Joseph and the birth of Jesus (1:18-25), but the Son-of-Abraham motif puzzlingly vanishes from view there. The cumulative weight, however, of an array of intertextual allusions to the OT story of Abraham, culminating in a direct quotation of Gen 17:19, constitutes in 1:18-25 an implicit appeal to the theme of the birth of Isaac and to the way in which the blessing of Abraham is to come to the nations of the world. Matthew of course immediately capitalizes on this theme in chap. 2 with the visit of the Magi, as well as in numerous other ways throughout the Gospel. But the implied reader sees it already expressed in chap. 1, emphasized there all the more, precisely because it is conveyed implicitly.

Key Words: Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, birth, Gentile, blessing

INTRODUCTION

That the NT portrays Jesus both as the Son of God and as the Son of David, designations carrying heavy christological freight for first-century readers, is clear to anyone who reads it. Less often and less emphatically, but no less explicitly, Jesus is also depicted in the NT as the Son of Abraham, both in the Gospels (Matt 1:2) and elsewhere (Gal 3:16).

N. Calvert lists three reasons why it is important that Jesus is seen as the Son of Abraham: it means he is a Jew, physically descended from Abraham; it means that through him the blessing of Abraham now comes to humanity; and it means that, while Abraham originates Israelite history, Jesus culminates it (Matt 1:17).¹ Of course, Jesus'

1. N. L. Calvert, "Abraham," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. R. P. Martin and G. Hawthorne; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992) 4.

physical descendance from Abraham—even if not exactly through Joseph's line—does indeed make him Jewish, though Paul and in a sense even John the Baptist redefine the house of Abraham in terms of faith rather than of blood (e.g., Rom 4:11-16; Luke 3:7-8 par.). Likewise, Jesus is indeed understood as the culmination of Israel's history—and of its religion—not only in Matt 1:17, but in other NT texts as well (e.g., in the Epistle to the Hebrews, esp. 8:1-13; 10:1-18; cf. Rom 10:4). And Jesus is clearly presented in Gal 3:14-16 as the path by which the blessing of Abraham comes to the Gentiles (cf. Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4). It is not explicitly so stated in Matthew's Gospel, but it has nevertheless been recognized there, too.² This recognition is based primarily on the twin facts that the Matthean genealogy (1:1-17) expressly highlights Abraham as an ancestor of Jesus—the ancestor par excellence in fact—and that Matthew³ exhibits a profound interest in the Gentiles and their access to the gospel.⁴

2. E.g., R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1979) 53, 67, 152; D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WBC 33A; Dallas: Word, 1993) 9-10. It has been observed that Matthew may have meant the reader to understand David, not Jesus, as the son of Abraham. R. H. Gundry almost completely downplays the connection between Jesus and Abraham in favor of the connection between Jesus and David; he takes even the three sets of fourteen generations in the genealogy as a numerological treatment of the name David (*Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982] 19). As will become clear, I think he has underplayed the Abrahamic connection to Jesus. So has L. T. Johnson (*The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985] 178), who says regarding Matthew's Gospel that, "as son of Abraham, [Jesus] is connected to the people as a whole. This is an important link for other NT authors, but Matthew does not exploit it (see only 3:9; 8:11; 22:32)."

3. Throughout the essay, when convenient, I will refer to the author or final redactor of the First Gospel as "Matthew," without implying anything thereby about his (or her?) individual or communal identity. Moreover, by the term "final redactor," I mean to imply that I am not concerning myself here with the history of the text's development; I am dealing only with its "final" form, as established for instance in NA²⁷.

4. This latter view, that Matthew exhibits a lively interest in the Gentile mission, is vigorously disputed in a detailed treatment by D. C. Sim ("The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," *JSNT* 57 [1995] 19-48). Because the thesis of Sim's essay strikes at the root of this notion, it is important to make a few comments on it here. While there is much to consider in Sim's article, it seems to me that his arguments are often overplayed or are rigidly unimaginative. For example, the sharp contrast he draws (p. 24) between Mark's references to the centurion at the cross and Matthew's redaction, such that Matthew is seen to go to extraordinary lengths beyond the Markan account in order to identify the centurion and his fellows with those who beat Jesus in Pilate's house, seems not only to exaggerate the implications of the actual differences between the two versions, but also to downplay the likelihood that these "brutal" men are portrayed here as being in a sense converted by their experience (see further, immediately below). His argument (pp. 22-23) that the four women (other than Mary) in the genealogy would not have appealed to the self-identity of Gentile readers because they represent at best (or at worst) mere proselytes and not out-and-out Gentiles, unimaginatively misses the point that their very proselytization illustrates what a Gentile-oriented Matthew would probably like to say: that true Judaism is intended to be a blessing to the Gentiles. Formerly

But the notion of Jesus as the Son of Abraham and as the line of the Abrahamic blessing to the Gentiles is embedded in the text of Matthew 1 more securely than by the genealogical reference alone. It is woven into the very fabric of the story of the angel's announcement to Joseph

Gentiles became members of Israel, now they enter the church, which itself is born of Israel. Similarly unimaginative is Sim's argument (pp. 25-30) that the negative portrayal of Gentiles in four passages (Matt 5:46-47; 6:31-32, 7-8; and 18:15-17) implies that Matthew's community shunned the Gentile world at all costs. Although this may in fact have been true for Jews in general, the First Gospel, as a message to *Christian* Jews, may well redirect the vision of the Matthean community toward the Gentile harvest. The almost proverbial nature of all four passages is enough to recommend a more cautious approach than Sim has taken. These four negative references to the Gentiles are hardly sufficient evidence of "Matthew's anti-Gentile stance" (p. 30). On the other hand, Sim is quite right to point out (p. 25) that Matthew portrays neither the Jews as entirely wicked nor the Gentiles as entirely positive. Sim's main error, it seems to me, is his moving from some instances of Matthean anti-Gentile rhetoric to a full Matthean anti-Gentile "stance." By the same logic we could as easily move from some Matthean anti-Jewish rhetoric to a full Matthean anti-Judaism. But neither "stance" is supportable. Nor is it necessary to assume, as Sim and others seem to do (p. 21), that a Jewish evangelist writing to a predominantly Jewish-Christian community will have nothing significantly good to say about the Gentiles, or vice versa. This holds even if we grant Sim's reconstruction of a time of Antiochene pogroms in post-war Syria, pogroms in which the Matthean community would have suffered no less than the synagogues. From this reconstructed circumstance Sim concludes (p. 41) that "a Gentile mission would have been inconceivable." Sim's inability to conceive of such a thing suggests he has missed one of the most remarkable features of Matthew's presentation of the messianic religion, a feature summed up in something Matthew has Jesus say precisely in the context of one of Sim's anti-Gentile passages: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt 5:43-44). Matthew may be a realist, but he is not a bigot. In an earlier article, Sim argues that the "confession" of the soldiers at the foot of the cross is not an early confession of Gentile faith but a cry of defeat and dismay ("The 'Confession of the Soldiers in Matthew 27:54,'" *HeyJ* 34 [1993J 401-24). He insists (pp. 412-14), e.g., that the proposed parallel between the centurion's confession in 27:54 and that of the disciples in 14:33 fails in part because the disciples' confession is wrongly motivated and rudimentary; it is merely preliminary to a more mature confession yet to come. Yet why that should prevent the confession of the centurion and his group from being portrayed as equally "preliminary" for the Gentile church as that of the disciples in 14:33 is for the Jewish church is not entirely explored; that these soldiers are themselves portrayed as evil, wicked characters in their treatment of Jesus can hardly be taken to imply they are to be considered irredeemable, as Sim wants to believe. While Sim's article is forceful and cogent in its way, his overly rigid and unimaginative approach renders it not completely convincing. Ignoring "gaps" in the narrative, e.g., he is led to conclude (pp. 407-408) that for Matthew faith is always a precondition for the miraculous and never a response to it; the faith of such characters as the centurion at Capernaum, the woman with the hemorrhage, and others is considered "completely unmotivated." This seems very narrow; if it were so, then why do these people come to Jesus at all? In any case, even if Sim's argument about Matt 27:54 were completely convincing—which it is far from being—one would not be compelled for that reason to abandon the view that Matthew is sympathetic to the Gentiles and their mission, as Sim wishes to argue in his *JSNT* article.

(1:18-25), which is rooted in the OT account of Abraham and Isaac. An analysis of Matthew's narrative strategy can reveal that this concern for the Gentiles underlies even the story of Jesus' birth.⁵

Obviously Joseph plays a key role in this text, and the parallels between him and Abraham have not gone unnoticed.⁶ Students of the NT have paid much more attention, however, to the parallels between Jesus and Isaac, though principally with reference to Isaac as a type of sacrificial offering⁷ or as a foreshadowing of the resurrection⁸ or in some other respect.⁹ It is my opinion, however, that Matthew 1 presents Joseph in the role of Abraham—and consequently Jesus in the role of Isaac—as the path of divine blessing for humanity, thereby partially "unpacking" the meaning of the genealogy and laying the groundwork for Matthew's treatment of the place of the Gentiles in the economy of the kingdom of heaven.

THE STRUCTURE AND COHERENCE OF MATTHEW 1

The upper limit of this passage could be placed at either 1:1 or 1:2, depending on how one understands the disputed role of 1:1: whether

5. Cf. D. J. Harrington, "New and Old in New Testament Interpretation: The Many Faces of Matthew 1:18-25," *New Theology Review* 2 (1989) 39-49, for a review of various exegetical approaches to this text. The passage perhaps ought to be titled "The Parentage of Jesus"; cf. L. Cantwell, "The Parentage of Jesus: Mt. 1:18-21," *NovT* 24 (1982) 304-15.

6. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 130, 131.

7. E.g., J. Winandy, "Le temoignage du sang et de l'eau Jean 19:17-37," *BVC* (Jan 1960) 19-27; R. A. Rosenberg, "Jesus, Isaac, and the 'Suffering Servant,'" *JBL* 84 (1965) 381-388; N. Hillyer, "The Servant of God," *EvQ* 41 (1969) 143-160; M. Wilcox, "'Upon the Tree': Deut. 21:22-23 in the New Testament," *JBL* 96 (1977) 85-99; P. R. Davies and B. D. Chilton, "The Aqedah: A Revised Tradition History," *CBQ* 40 (1978) 514-546; R. Hayward, "The Present State of Research into the Targumic Account of the Sacrifice of Isaac," *JJS* 32 (1981) 127-150; B. H. Grigsby, "The Cross as an Expiatory Sacrifice in the Fourth Gospel," *JSNT* 15 (1982) 51-80; J. A. Grassi, 'Abba, Father (Mark 14:36): Another Approach," *JAAR* 50 (1982) 449-58; G. G. Stroumsa, "Hermeneutique biblique et identité L'Exemple d'Isaac," *RB* 99 (1992) 529-43; R. M. Jensen, "Isaac as a Christological Symbol in Early Christian Art," *Arts in Religious and Theological Studies* 5 (1993) 6-12; F. O. Parker, "A Study of the Akedah in Paul's Letter to the Galatians" (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1994); J. D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); cf. T. Peters, ed., "A Discussion of Jon D. Levenson's *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*," *Dialog* 34 (Winter 1995) 52-66.

8. I. Reist, "The Old Testament Basis for the Resurrection Faith," *EvQ* 43 (1971) 6-24; M. Wilcox, "The Promise of the 'Seed' in the New Testament and the Targumim," *JSNT* 5 (1979) 2-20.

9. P. Grelot, "Jean 8,56 et Jubiles 16,16-29," *RevQ* 13 (1988) 621-628; C. A. Gieschen, "The Seven Pillars of the World: Ideal Figure Lists in the Christology of the Pseudo-Clementines," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 12 (1994) 47-82; E. Fascher, "Isaak und Christus: Zur Frage einer Typologie in Wort und Bild," in *Bild und Verkündigung: Festgabe H. Jursch* (ed. J. Schöffler; Berlin: Evangelische, 1962) 38-53.

as the title for the entire Gospel or as the heading for the opening pericope. But a chiastically shaped inclusio at 1:1/1:17 suggests that 1:1 is in fact the heading for 1:1-17: the introductory reference in 1:1 to the birth of Jesus Christ (Messiah Jesus?), Son of David, Son of Abraham, is matched in 1:17—in reverse order—by the summary reference to the generations from Abraham to David, from David to the Babylonian exile, and from the exile to the Messiah. The absence of the exile from the first member of the inclusio and its incorporation into the second do not nullify the chiastic correspondence, but in fact, as we shall see, the exile's appearance here enhances in its own way the overall effect of the entire chapter.

The structure, character, and content of the genealogy proper in 1:2-16 clearly mark it off from the following narrative material in 1:18-25, as does the inclusio just mentioned. Moreover, the occurrence of the term γένεσις in 1:1 and 1:18, even though in two different senses ("genealogy," "birth"), suggests a division at 1:17/18.

Possibly another inclusio delimits 1:18-25, consisting of the repeated mentions in vv. 18 and 25 of both the name of Jesus and the lack of sexual relations between Joseph and Mary. I say only "possibly" because the phraseology in 1:25 actually has more in common with 1:21 than with 1:18. Yet even if this inclusio is doubtful, the opening genitive absolute in 2:1, strikingly similar to the opening phrase in 1:18 (which itself is *not* a genitive absolute), together with the change of scene, time, and cast, constitute a decisive signal of a major break at 1:25/2:1.¹⁰ But the most decisive indication of the coherence of 1:18-25 as a unit is its internal chiastic form:¹¹

- A. Mary's unusual pregnancy and Jesus' birth (v. 18)
- B. Joseph's perplexity (v. 19)
- C. The message of the angel (vv. 20-21)
- C'. The comment of the evangelist (vv. 22-23)
- B'. Joseph's resolution
- A'. Mary's unusual pregnancy and the birth (v. 25)

Thus there are two pericopes in the opening chapter of Matthew: 1:1-17 and 1:18-25. The repetition of γένεσις in vv. 1 and 18 and further factors yet to be seen connect these two adjacent texts more closely to each other than the second is connected to what follows it. As Hagner and others note, the second pericope, covering the annunciation and birth, is intended to explain the surprising way

10. See the various criteria for "discontinuity" presented by S. H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook* (Dallas: SIL, 1992) 13-30.

11. See B. Van Elderen, "The Significance of the Structure of Matthew 1," in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan* (ed. J. Vardaman and E. M. Yamauchi; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1989) 9.

the genealogy ends in the first pericope, where in 1:16 the pattern of a standard¹² genealogical "begetting" formula is broken in order to exclude Joseph from the biological process of the Messiah's birth.¹³

THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS: MATTHEW 1:1-17

The Matthean genealogy of Jesus raises of its own accord a host of problems which are taken up in the main commentaries; many of these problems do not directly concern the subject of this essay. But considering a few of the more relevant issues will provide a background for the discussion which follows. For one thing, a comparison of Luke's genealogy of Jesus (Luke 3:23-38) with Matthew's is revealing. Whereas Matthew lists generations only from Abraham to Jesus, Luke of course runs his series all the way back to God himself. The fact that Luke, contrary to Matthew, arranges his list in ascending order enables him to end on the emphatically christological note "Son of God." But it also highlights Luke's sympathy toward the Gentile mission: Jesus, like all of humankind, traces his ancestry through Adam to the Creator. That Matthew stops—or rather starts—with Abraham might seem to suggest a lack of interest in the Gentile mission on Matthew's part and a focus instead on Jesus' Jewishness. It certainly does imply that Jesus is Jewish, of course, and that he is the long-awaited Jewish Messiah (χριστός, v. 1). But there is more to it than that, as will be argued below.

The respective placement of the two genealogies is also of interest here. Luke withholds his version until after Jesus has been baptized and as he is about to embark on his public ministry;¹⁴ the genealogy is thus inserted between the baptism and the wilderness temptation. Taken together with the way the list ends with Adam and God, this gives the impression that Jesus is to be understood as the New Adam, who—the second time around—does not succumb to temptation. In this, again, he represents all humanity. In the First Gospel, on the other hand, the genealogy begins the entire story, raising and answering at the very outset the question of identity: Who is this person?¹⁵ He is at least "the"¹⁶ Son of Abraham (1:1).

12. While occurring only here in the NT, this particular genealogical formula, X ἐγέννησεν Y, Y ἐγέννησεν Z . . . , is used in several places in the LXX: Gen 4:18; 10:4; Ruth 4:19-22; 1 Chr (1 Par) 2:10-41; 4:2, 14; 5:30-40; 8:33, 36; 9:39, 42; Neh 12 (2 Esdr 22):10-11. Matthew is apparently modeling his list on the one he finds in 1 Chronicles.

13. Hagner, *Matthew* 1-13, 14.

14. Of course, Luke moves the baptism scene as well to a point in the gospel story considerably earlier than where it occurs in Mark.

15. K. Stendahl, "Quis et Unde? An Analysis of Mt 1-2," in *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche* (J. Jeremias Festschrift; ed. W. Eltester; BZNW 26; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1964) 94-105. Cf. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 53-54.

16. Although all nouns in 1:1 are anarthrous, there need be little doubt that the expression υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ, "son of Abraham," like the expressions Χριστοῦ, "Christ" and

He is also the messianic Son of David. This dual sonship is in fact the main point of the genealogy's three-part structure, as 1:1 and 1:17 make obvious. How the sequence of other names in Matthew's list corresponds with that in Luke's list or how it is to be explained in terms of its presumed exemplar in 1 Chronicles 1-3 is an interesting and involved subject.¹⁷ The only point that needs to be made about these issues here, however, is that Matthew has definitely schematized his material in order to highlight both Abraham and David as the two pivotal ancestors of Jesus. (The importance for this scheme of including the Babylonian exile on a level with Abraham and David will be considered shortly.) The other names, for the most part, merely establish the links between these patriarchs and Jesus.

I say "for the most part" because some of the names included by Matthew seem to be deliberately added for the purpose of implying something more about the Messiah's pedigree than its prestige. Obviously many of the royal names in the list are associated with less than honorable behavior, but at least they are royal.¹⁸ Five other names, however, all of women, and found only in Matthew, not in Luke, suggest an earthiness in the Messiah's bloodline. Tamar, daughter-in-law of Judah the patriarch, is in fact mentioned in the Chronicler's list (1 Chr 2:4) as the mother of Judah's sons Perez and Zerah. (She is not to be confused with Tamar the daughter of David, who appears in the same genealogy at 1 Chr 3:10.) It is no surprise, then, that Matthew includes her name in his own genealogy. But in addition to her, Matthew inserts the names of Rahab (v. 5),¹⁹ Ruth (v. 5), "the [wife] of Uriah" (i.e., Bathsheba, v. 6), and of course Mary (v. 16). The question, then, is why these women, and only these, are incorporated into the account of the Messiah's ancestry.

υἱοῦ Δαυίδ, "son of David," is to be understood as definite (cf. Matt 12:23; 21:9, 15-17; 22:42; as well as 1:16). Jesus is the Son of Abraham, according to Matthew. (Contrast E. Schweizer's translation: "who was a descendant of David, who was a descendant of Abraham." *The Good News According to Matthew* [trans. D. E. Green; Atlanta: John Knox, 1975] 21.) It would be interesting to know whether there were any early Jewish or rabbinic expectations of the Son of Abraham, as there were, and still are, of the Son of David.

17. See Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 5-12; Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 55-95, and others for discussion and proposed interpretations.

18. Nonetheless, even Matthew appears to balk at including three members of Queen Athaliah's family (between Joram and Uzziah, Matt 1:8—i.e., between Joram and Azariah in 1 Chr 3:11-12). Ostensibly, leaving them out helps him to achieve a balanced number of generations (theoretically fourteen in each stage), but it is significant that precisely these persons are omitted. Cf. 1 Chr 3:10-17. Note also the scantily attested variant lin Matt 1:8. On a similar note, Hagner suggests that Bathsheba's name is deliberately avoided (v. 6) so as to set David in contrast with the righteous (Gentile!) Uriah (*Matthew 1-13*, 11).

19. Presumably the harlot of Jericho, although the timing of her appearance raises questions; cf., e.g., Hagner, *ibid.*

R. E. Brown²⁰ surveys three historical explanations: (1) all five women are sinners or—in Mary's case—thought to be sinners (this is the view of Jerome); (2) all except Mary are foreigners (the view of Luther); and (3) all five, Mary included, represent both a certain irregularity in their unions with the fathers of their offspring as well as some personal initiative in their being used by God to carry out his purposes in history (the view adopted by a growing consensus in recent scholarship). Although Brown prefers the third explanation, he recognizes the "subordinate" value of Luther's view, that four of the Messiah's ancestresses are blemished by Gentile blood. Brown rightly objects to the primacy of this understanding because it severs the connection between Mary and the four other women—a connection which the reader is led to expect as the purpose of their presence in the list and which the third explanation addresses admirably. One is tempted to appeal here to the "Gentile connections" Mary has as an apparent native of Galilee—Galilee of the *Gentiles* as Matthew himself stresses (Matt 4:15). But we hear of this native connection only from Luke's Gospel (1:26); Matthew himself gives the distinct impression that Mary and Joseph both are native to Bethlehem in Judea and move to Galilee only when it appears unsafe to raise the child in Judea (2:22-33). Still, in the light of the intertextual signals to be observed in the next pericope, I believe the Gentile connections characterizing Tamar, Rahab,²¹ Ruth, and Bathsheba, if not Mary, constitute at least part of the way Matthew enhances the universal relevance of his genealogy without sacrificing the particular dramatic power that comes of founding it on Abraham and David rather than on Adam and God.

Thus, the Matthean genealogy is to be understood to say that the designations "Son of Abraham" and "Son of David" are crucial for answering the question, Who is this person Jesus? That he is the Son of David implies he is the long-awaited messianic king of Israel. But that he is the Son of Abraham will be understood to mean more than simply his Jewishness. If the theme of universalism is adumbrated in the four OT women of the genealogy, then the clearly expressed emphasis on Jesus' Abrahamic sonship (1:1, 17) may be intended to say that he is *the* Abrahamic offspring through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed.

It is interesting to take into consideration here the extraordinary efforts to which Second-Temple Judaism went in order to ensure genealogical purity in the generations following the return from

20. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 71-74.

21. *B. Meg.* 14:2 expresses doubt about Rahab's Canaanite lineage, since it would have been unlawful for Joshua to marry even a proselyte. Thus she must have been something other than Canaanite!

Babylon. These efforts included even the recording of certain persons as bastards so that they and their descendants might be forever known and recognized as genealogically tainted.²² This suggests then how remarkable it was for Matthew to introduce Gentile blood intentionally into the account of the Messiah's lineage—not to mention laying the Messiah himself open to the suspicion of being a bastard. Very likely Matthew was fully aware of what he was doing in this regard.

But what can be said about the function of the Babylonian exile in the structure of the genealogy? From one perspective, of course, it is part of the history of Israel, and this history necessarily forms a framework, or backdrop, for the succession of fathers, mothers, and sons which the genealogy relates. It fits in here simply because it happened to these very people. On the other hand, it cannot be insignificant that Matthew ranks it on a level with Abraham, David, and the Messiah as one of the prime turning points in this great succession of generations. But what is that significance? If the exile is interpreted by the prophets as God's chastisement of Israel for her failure to keep his ways and to be his people among the nations (e.g., Ezekiel 20), perhaps it functions in Matthew's genealogy as yet one more indicator of God's interest in the nations and in his people's call to woo them to Israel's God, to be the means of his blessing them (cf. Israel's failure to do so, Ezek 36:16-38; 39:21-24). If Israel could not be that means at home on their own land, perhaps they could do so transported to a foreign land. The assumption of such a mission-minded proselytizing purpose for the exile is not unknown in early Jewish exegesis. R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, who as a student met Vespasian before the walls of Jerusalem, is reported to have said, "The Holy One, blessed be he, exiled the Israelites among the nations only so that converts should join them. . . . Certainly someone sows a seah of seed to harvest many kor of seed."²³ And the roughly contemporary *Apocalypse of 2 Baruch* sees the exile both as a punishment of Israel and as an opportunity for Israel to "do good" to the Gentiles, that is, to proselytize them (1:4-5).²⁴ In any case, Matthew's use of the exile in the genealogy could be taken to imply, like the Messiah's unique relation of sonship to

22. See J. Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica: Matthew-1 Corinthians* (4 vols.; Oxford, 1859; reprinted, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989; originally published 1658-1674) 2.7-9. M. Goldstein shows that the passages involved, *m. Yebam.* 4:13 and *b. Yebam.* 49a, while often understood to refer to the birth of Jesus, do not have that event in mind (*Jesus in the Jewish Tradition* [New York: Macmillan, 1950] 67-72).

23. *B. Pesah.* 87b (= 8:1), translated by J. Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud: An Academic Commentary, Vol. 4: Bavli Tractate Pesahim* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996) 421.

24. For references to these and other ancient Jewish interpretations of the exile, see W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T Clark, 1988-97) 1.179.

Abraham, that the Messiah's pedigree has a universal significance. Jesus, who in time will be recognized as the Son of God (Matt 8:29; 16:16; 26:63), and is shortly to be named Emmanuel, "God *with us*" (1:23), is in a sense himself exiled among the people of Israel just as Israel was exiled among the nations. He thus brings to them the blessing of God, does "good" to them, but not just to *them*.²⁵ This same universalist theme also operates below the surface of 1:18-25, informing the entire Gospel that follows. We turn now to that.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS: MATTHEW 1:18-25

Hagner²⁶ rightly regards the pericope on Jesus' birth (Matt 1:18-25) as explaining the surprising element in 1:16, where the pattern X ἐγέννησεν Y (X "begat" Y) is disrupted so as to exclude Joseph from the begetting process.²⁷ Jesus' birth is a virgin birth, engendered by the Holy Spirit rather than by the ordinary course of human sexual relations.²⁸ Moreover, this peculiar birth is presented as in fulfillment of prophetic Scripture (1:22-23),²⁹ which, according to Matthew, expected not only a virgin birth but also, as a result, the "presence" of God within human society. But this birth pericope also picks up the theme of double sonship around which the genealogy is constructed.

The role of Jesus as the messianic Son of David and heir of kings, emphasized in the genealogy, is reinforced by the angel's addressing Joseph himself as son of David (1:20). Furthermore, when in 1:21 the angel explains the name "Jesus" by paraphrasing Ps 130 [LXX 129]:8 (καὶ αὐτὸς λυτρώσεται τὸν Ἰσραὴλ ἐκ πασῶν τῶν ἀνομιῶν αὐτοῦ, "and he himself will redeem Israel from all his iniquities"; cf. Matt 1:21b

25. Another possibility, probably remote, for the significance of this reference to the exile may be seen in the way Hab 3:19 directly echoes the words of David in Ps 18:33 (= 2 Sam 22:34). This may be read as the expectation of a future David who will make good the suffering of the exiles. (I owe this idea to a student in the audience at a reading of an earlier version of this essay. Unfortunately, I do not know the student's name.)

26. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 14.

27. Excluding him from at least the biological process of begetting; "begetting" can be understood in a legal sense, too (cf. Brown, *ibid.*, 61-64).

28. Brown (*ibid.*, 53-54) in a similar way views 1:18-25 as primarily focused on the "how" (*quomodo*) of Jesus' birth, thus expanding on Stendahl's *quis et unde* scheme.

29. The one divergence in Matthew's quotation of the LXX text of Isa 7:14, where he changes the LXX καλέσεις, "you (sg.) shall call" to καλέσουσιν, "they shall call," is probably to be explained as an accommodation to the context of Matt 1:18-25, and in particular to Matt 1:21, thus including Joseph in the naming process. The MT 3fs is reflected in the LXX version of Symmachus; it may have been altered by the LXX to 2s in imitation of Gen 17:19. The 3p1. in numerous later LXX minuscules is probably an imitation of Matt 1:23. Gundry (*Matthew*, 25) believes the switch to καλέσουσιν is intended to turn the quotation of Isa 7:14 into a prediction of the church's confession. This seems an unnecessary stretch to me.

αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν, "for he himself will save his people from their sins"), he thereby alludes to the Davidic messianic deliverer, as is clear from the answer given in Ps 132:17 to the cries of despair in Psalms 130 and 131: "There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one (LXX: τῷ χριστῷ μου)."³⁰

However, the parallel role of Jesus as Son of Abraham, equally emphasized in the genealogy, surprisingly lacks in 1:18-25 the kind of overt reinforcement accorded there to the theme of the Son of David. This can give the impression that for Matthew, at least at the outset of his Gospel, the Davidic messiahship of Jesus is of more importance than the Abrahamic connection. It may well be. However, at least seven features of the text—some more clearly than others—reflect the story Of Abraham in Genesis 12-17 and thus buttress the theme more firmly than might at first appear to be the case. These seven features may be listed as follows:

(1) Just as the word of the Lord comes to Abram in a vision (ἐν ὁράματι, Gen 15:1), so the angel appears to Joseph in a dream (κατ' ὄναρ, Matt 1:20). Of course, dreams and visions are familiar fare in the OT and in the NT, and for this reason it may not be significant for the present thesis that one occurs here. Indeed, in their respective scenes, Joseph is asleep (1:24) and Abram is not. If it occurred here by itself, this motif in Matthew would carry little power of conviction as evidence of an intentional literary allusion to Genesis 15. But it belongs to a host of such allusions, to which it makes its small contribution in producing a rather remarkable impression.

(2) Just as the Lord tells Abram not to fear (μὴ φοβοῦ, Gen 15:1), so the angel comforts the dreaming Joseph with the words "do not be afraid" (μὴ φοβηθῆς, Matt 1:20). Again, by itself this is not very convincing evidence of an allusion specifically to Genesis 15, for two reasons. First, like scenes constructed around dreams and visions, this kind of scene, where a supernatural messenger—even God—appears to a person and tells him or her not to be afraid, is not uncommon in the OT. Besides Abram's experience, it happens also to Hagar (Gen

30. The medieval compilation of ancient *halakot* and *haggadot*, *Yalqut Shimeoni* (§429), explains how the sinners of Israel and the righteous of the Gentiles will be rescued from Gehinnom. Appeal is made to Ps 132:9, "Let your priests be clothed with righteousness and let your faithful shout for joy," with the comment: "Thy priests,' these are the righteous of the Gentiles, who are God's priests in the world." Cited in H. Loewe, "Pharisaism," in *Judaism and Christianity* (ed. W. E. Oesterley et al.; 3 vols.; 1937–1938; reprinted, 3 vols. in 1; New York: Ktav, 1969) 1.117-118. This shows that some Jewish exegetes read Psalm 132 in terms of the Gentiles. Whether this exegesis dates to the first century, however, is not clear. Tertullian (*An Answer to the Jews*, 9) sees the "lamp" in Ps 132:17 as a prophetic reference to John the Baptist; similarly Augustine (*Sermons on New Testament Lessons*, 78.2; *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 23.2).

21:17), Isaac (Gen 26:24), Jacob (twice: Gen 28:12-13; 46:2-3), Gideon (Judg 6:22-23), Daniel (Dan 10:12-21), and to Tobit and his son (Tob 12:15-17). On the other hand, only in the cases of Abram, Isaac, Jacob, and Daniel, and now of Matthew's Joseph, do the encounters occur in a vision or during sleep. Second, instead of being told simply not to fear, as Abram was (fear the speaker presumably), Joseph is instructed not to be afraid *to take Mary as his wife*. It is not implied that Joseph was in awe of the angel, though it would not be surprising if he were! In this, the scene more closely resembles the aged Jacob's second encounter, in Genesis 46, where God assures him he need not be afraid *to go down to Egypt*. Nonetheless, although the angel's reassurance to Joseph, like the dream itself, cannot stand on its own as an indication of intentional literary allusion, it does indeed fall into a small category of narrative motifs which also show up in the Abraham story.

(3) In his dialogue with the Lord, Abram complains that he has been left childless (ἀπολύομαι ἄτεκνος, Gen 15:2³¹); a form of this same verb, ἀπολύσαι, is used in Matt 1:19 to refer to Joseph's contemplated rejection of Mary. While the evidential value of this correspondence is perhaps even less than that of the two preceding items, it is at least worth observing that although the LXX employs several verbs for its many references to the act of divorce (ἐκβάλλειν, ἐκφέρειν, ἐξαποστέλλειν, ἀποστέλλειν, ἀφιέναι), it uses the verb ἀπολύειν this way only in 1 Esdr 9:36, that is to say, only once in its twenty-seven occurrences. On the other hand, ἀπολύειν is a favorite word for divorce in the Synoptic Gospels, and especially in Matthew, who follows both Mark and his own sources in this. Still, it could be argued that: in 1:20 Matthew avoids, perhaps deliberately, any of the much more common OT divorce vocabulary, and instead uses ἀπολύειν precisely in order to forge a verbal link with the account of Abraham in Genesis 15.

(4) More interesting is the observation that Jesus, like Isaac, is born to a "barren" woman, a parallel observed long ago by Chrysostom (*Homilies on St. John* 26:2).³² Obviously, Mary is not "barren" in the same sense as was Sarah, but her pregnancy is no less miraculous. In a discussion of the use of typology in Jewish exegesis, Michael Fishbane draws attention to this very sort of parallel: "The repetition of certain themes like the problematic birth of the heir through a favorite wife (who is barren, and whose pregnancy is announced by a divine oracle) . . . may be a deliberate attempt of the narrative tradition to

31. The MT reads וְאֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי, "and I continue childless"; with its rendering of הוֹלֵךְ as ἀπολύομαι, the LXX could be taken to mean "and I am going to die childless."

32. Cf. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, 85.

present the 'fathers' as figures of each other, as typologically inter-related."³³ This is precisely what I am arguing here.

(5) We may note as well the parallel between, on the one hand, Abram's (passive-aggressive!) rejection of Hagar and its divinely arranged reversal (Gen 16:5-6, 9), and on the other hand, Joseph's contemplated rejection of Mary and its own divine reversal (1:20-21). Even though the parallel would be more compelling for the present purpose if Sarai had been sent away instead of Hagar, still, the incident in Matthew 1 is reminiscent of the larger story of Abraham.

(6) While few if any of the foregoing factors are convincing on their own, as I have already said, their cumulative weight begins to tilt the scale. Thus when Joseph's hesitancy to make a public spectacle of Mary³⁴ is attributed to his being a "just man" (δίκαιος ὢν, Matt 1:19), we may, in the midst of a constellation of other Abrahamic themes, justifiably feel ourselves reminded of Abram's faith in the Lord's word, which was counted to him as righteousness (εἰς δικαιοσύνην, Gen 15:1, 6).³⁵ There seems to me to be no reason why Matthew's characterizing Joseph in this way cannot serve more than one purpose. For one thing, it makes explicit for the readers ("tells" them) what Joseph's intentions show (or "index"³⁶) about him, that Joseph is an upright, Torah-honoring man who is also compassionate and not vindictive. But it also becomes part of this subtle, multifaceted intertextual treatment of the story of Abraham and the blessing given him there

33. M. A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) 373.

34. Or is it his decision to break off the arrangement? See the presentation of options in Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 125-28. For other discussions of Joseph's righteous character, see also X. Léon-Dufour, "Le juste Joseph," *NRT* 81 (1959) 225-31; J. J. Davis, "A Thomistic Josephology (Part 9)," *Cahiers de Josephologie* 13 (1965) 283-301; A. A. Sicari, "'Joseph justus' (Matteo 1,19): La storia dell' interpretazione a le nuove prospettive," *Cahiers de Josephologie* 19 (1971) 62-83; A. Milavec, "Matthew's Integration of Sexual and Divine Begetting," *BTB* 8 (1978) 108-16; A. Tosato, "Joseph, Being a Just Man," *CBQ* 41 (1979) 547-51; R. E. Brown, "The Annunciation to Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25)," *Worship* 61 (1987) 482-92; D. C. Allison, "Divorce, Celibacy and Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25 and 19:1-12)," *JSNT* 49 (1993) 3-10. These treatments approach the question of Joseph's "justness" from within the circumstances of the Matthean birth narrative and the Gospel generally. Without denying that Joseph indeed acted in some sense "justly," we can nevertheless look to Gen 15:6 for an equally motivating, if not an even more motivating, factor in Matthew's use of this descriptor here.

35. Noah is called a "righteous man" in Gen 6:9, but no other echo of his story appears in Matthew 1.

36. "Indexing" is the name Seymour Chatman (*Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978] 32-33) gives to the effect which narrated events have on the exposition of a character in a narrative. To use his example, the event described as "John seduced Mary" indexes about John that he is a seducer.

for all humanity; it supplements the growing "ambience of Abraham," so to speak, whereby the reader of Matthew 1 is encouraged to consider the story of Jesus' miraculous birth in the context of the miraculous birth of Isaac. Furthermore, the fact that Joseph's righteous character and his merciful treatment of Mary foreshadow the righteousness and mercy of Jesus (as Gundry notes³⁷) serves to create yet another connection between Abraham, the just, and Jesus his "son."

(7) This brings us at last to a very clear and convincing feature in the text of Matt 1:18-25, namely, the actual wording of the angel's announcement to Joseph; minor understandable changes aside, it corresponds exactly to the LXX's wording of the promise which God delivers to Abraham in Gen 17:19:³⁸

Gen 17:19: . . . τέξεται σοι υἱόν, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰσαακ
"She shall bear you a son, and you (sg.) shall call his name Isaac."

Matt 1:23: . . . τέξεται δὲ υἱόν, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν
"She shall bear a son, and you (sg.) shall call his name Jesus."

The names to be given to the two children differ, of course (though it is notable that they both begin with the same letter), and Matthew has omitted the σοι of Gen 17:19 because Mary will not bear this child to Joseph in the same way Sarah will bear Isaac to Abraham: but these alterations are to be expected. Moreover, both passages are preceded by parallel references to the wives of the addressees: Σαρρα ἡ γυνή σου, "Sarah, your wife" (Gen 17:19), and Μαρίαν τὴν γυναῖκα σου, "Mary, your wife" (Matt 1:20). There is little reason to doubt that in some way the birth of Isaac is presented here as a type of the birth of Jesus.

It is viewed otherwise nevertheless. Hagner sees the announcement in 1:21, and indeed the entire pericope, as a narrative that has been midrashically reworked in a way directly dependent on the LXX of Isa 7:14, quoted in Matt 1:23.³⁹ There are valuable insights in his ar-

37. Gundry, *Matthew*, 21. Gundry calls attention to the profusion of δικ- and ἔλεε- vocabulary in Matthew.

38. A search of GRAMCORD's acCordance 2.1 software for Macintosh yields sixteen LXX occurrences of the string τίκτειν + υἱόν + καλεῖν + ὄνομα; thirteen of them are reports framed in the aorist: X bore a son and called his name Y (only Isa 8:3 is slightly different in this regard). Only three (all annunciations), Gen 16:11; 17:19; and Isa 7:14, are framed in the future: X (or "you") shall bear a son and you shall call his name Y. Of these three annunciations, Gen 16:11 (Hagar/Ishmael) and Isa 7:14 both refer to the conception (ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει / ἔξει); Gen 17:19 (Sarah/Isaac), like Matt 1:21, does not.

39. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 14, 15-16, 19.

gument, but they do not seem to me to override the obvious verbal parallel between Matt 1:21 and Gen 17:19.⁴⁰ In fact, with its reference to conception (ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει the Isaiah passage is much more closely connected with the angelic announcement to Hagar (Gen 16:11) than with that to Joseph.

Without denying the validity of a number of other interpretations which can be placed on Matthew 1, then, I believe it is equally valid and exegetically required to view the text in this "Abrahamic" way. We may sum up the reasons briefly. (1) The Matthean genealogy, set at the very front of the Gospel, functions as an initial statement of Matthew's agenda. (2) Whatever else these agenda may include, an important element is the portrayal of Jesus as both the Son of Abraham and the Son of David, stated—at least in the genealogy—with equal emphasis. (3) The appearance of four "foreign" women in the genealogy (three unexpectedly) as well as the prominence given there to the Babylonian exile draw the readers' attention from the outset to the issue of the Gentile world, an issue which becomes of major importance to Matthew as the Gospel progresses. (4) Through Joseph's being addressed as "Son of David," the theme of Davidic sonship is explicitly reinforced in the birth narrative following the genealogy; it is further affirmed through the allusion to Psalms 130-132 in Matt 1:21. But the theme of Abrahamic sonship, equally highlighted in the genealogy, seems forgotten in 1:18-25. This is jarring. (5) Yet a number of features of the birth pericope lend support to the fact that Matthew does indeed address Jesus' Abrahamic sonship there, though in an oblique way. Not all of these narrative features are exclusively reminiscent of the story of Abraham; several of them could also be seen as allusions to any of a handful of other OT contexts. But the very congregation around the Abrahamic tradition of so many otherwise ambiguous parallels, coupled with the way in which Matt 1:21 clearly echoes God's announcement to Abraham in Gen 17:19, makes a strong case for reading Matt 1:18-25 in the light of Genesis 12-17.

40. Hagner, for example (*ibid.*, 15-16), stresses the "central importance" of Isa 7:14 for Matt 1:18-25 and draws attention to the fact that Matt 1:18-25 places its fulfillment quotation in the midst of the pericope, rather than at the end as is done with the formula quotations of Matthew 2. From this he apparently concludes that Matthew is constructing this passage "around" the Isaiah quotation. The language parallel to Isa 7:14 which he finds throughout 1:18-25 further supports this thesis. However, it seems to me that the fact that the Isaiah quotation does not come at the end of Matt 1:18-25 diminishes its importance rather than heightens it. Moreover, in addition to the closer verbal parallels, mentioned above, between Gen 17:19 and Matt 1:21, it is worth noting that the immediate sequels to both Gen 17:19 and Matt 1:21 have to do with the descendants of Abraham and the people of God, whereas the sequel to Isa 7:14 (as well as the sequel to Gen 16:11) goes in quite another direction.

CONCLUSION

The role of the royal Davidic Messiah is explained by Matthew as the salvation of "his people" (i.e., the Messiah's people) from their sins (1:21). But even here, it is "his people"—rather than "Israel" as Psalm 130 has it—whom the Messiah Jesus shall save; even the notion of Son of David is thus imbued with universal significance.⁴¹ The equally important role of the Son of the Abrahamic Covenant on the other hand is, for now, left vague. We may conclude, however that the implied reader is supposed to think of Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4, in which God promises Abram/Abraham and Isaac that all the families of the earth shall be blessed in them and through their seed.⁴² The implicit theme of Abrahamic sonship, once recognized in Matt 1:18-25, is in fact felt all the more profoundly precisely because it has been conveyed implicitly.

Fishbane observes that for ancient Jewish exegetes, the three blessings given to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3—land, seed, and earthly blessing—are "in fact a typological reversal of the primordial curses in Eden: directed against the earth, human generativity, and human labor."⁴³ But if this is so, and if this connection was in Matthew's mind, then he is likely to have drawn the obvious conclusion: just as the curses of Eden were universal, so these blessings of Abraham are universal blessings, valid for all the nations of the earth. This universality is hinted at, further, in Matthew's own exegesis of Isa 7:14, quoted in 1:23: the notion of Emmanuel, "God is with us," occurs again at the end of the Gospel in the Great Commission, where the risen Jesus sends his followers out to preach the gospel to *all the nations*, promising that as they do so, *he will be with them* to the end of the age (28:20). Matthew's concern for the nations shows up in fact throughout his Gospel, most immediately for this context in the story of the magi (2:1-12), where pagan astrologers seek the newborn king of the Jews to worship him, while the Jewish authorities seek to kill him. With considerable irony, Matthew tells us that Joseph receives divine instruction to flee *from* Israel *to* Egypt in order to protect the child from his Jewish enemies (2:13-15). This interest in the nations appears as well in the healing of

41. For Gundry (*Matthew*, 23-24), this means the church. Chrysostom views "his people" in Matt 1:21 as a reference to Israel, since the matter of the salvation of the "Hebrews" necessarily precedes that of the salvation of anyone else (*Homilies on Hebrews* 5.3).

42. *Tg. Onq.* Gen 12:3; 22:18; 26:4 reads that the nations shall be blessed on account of Abraham and his seed (reading בְּלִיךָ "on account of you" for בְּךָ "in you"). This is apparently to be understood as "because of the merits of Abraham and his seed." So M. Auerbach and B. Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis: A Critical Analysis together with and English Translation of the Text* (New York: Ktav, 1982) 78-79, 132-33, 154.

43. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 372-73.

the centurion's servant, where Jesus claims he has not encountered such faith even in Israel and predicts that Gentiles will recline at the messianic banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the places traditionally thought reserved for the returning, scattered exiles, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown out (Matt 8:5-13). Even the traditional racial understanding of "sons" or "children" of Abraham is challenged. Thus when John the Baptist sees Pharisees and Sadducees coming out from Jerusalem to investigate his activities, he attacks them with a warning not to pride themselves on having Abraham as father, since God can raise up children to Abraham from mere stones (Matt 3:9). Implied here is more than a redefinition of membership in the covenant; Matthew is drawing a stunning contrast between those "children of Abraham" who in their *particularism* have failed in the mission to be a *universal* blessing to the world and *the* (very Jewish) Son of Abraham who is now about to make his entrance, fully grown, on the scene of history. He will not fail.⁴⁴

This subtle Matthean focus on Jesus as the Isaac-like Son of Abraham, the path of God's blessing for all nations, is all the more remarkable, if (as D. C. Sim argues; see n. 4 above) the mostly Jewish Matthean community had endured severe persecution and pogroms from their Gentile neighbors in Antioch following the war of 66-70 CE. It means that for "Matthew" at least, Jesus' call to love one's enemies and to pray for one's persecutors (Matt 5:43–48) is more than a mere platitude; for him it means that the children of Abraham become thereby children of their Father in heaven. By telling the story of Jesus' birth in this Gentile-friendly way, Matthew declares where he wishes himself and his people to stand.

44. Not all of the "children of Abraham" have failed in this way, of course; "Matthew" himself is probably Jewish. Nor does he portray the Jewish race in general as irretrievably lost. This is not an anti-Jewish, much less an anti-Semitic, Gospel. What Matthew is preaching is the incorporation of the entire human race into one, Jewish and Gentile together. He treats roughly only those representative Jews who insist on particularity, on exclusivism. He would doubtless treat equally roughly anyone who espouses an exclusive, particularist doctrine, Gentile or Jew, much as Saul, the Jew from Tarsus, had already done by means of the olive-tree metaphor in Romans 11. And speaking of Paul, it is interesting to note that in Rom 4:1-12, somewhat like Matthew in his genealogy, Paul appeals to the Abraham-David axis in the interest of arguing that Gentiles and Jews are on an equal footing before God.