

Today we'll start actually going through the Harmony of the Gospels. Hopefully you've taken a look at it and gone through the first few pages. Our plan is to go through it page by page, with occasional background sermons or sermonettes or Bible studies on particular portions such as John 1. John 1 is a huge topic by itself that we couldn't cover in one class, so I plan to cover that in a separate sermon as a separate topic.

There will be some days when we will take more time with certain areas. If you do have questions I hope that you'll feel free to ask them when we get to that part or subject. Hopefully we'll be able to take care of most of those as they come up, and if I or no one else has the answer, we'll research it and come back with an answer.

These classes are supposed to be interactive, but the level of interactivity will be somewhat dependent on two things—first, your level of participation (because we don't have interactivity if people don't interact), and second, some parts of the material lend themselves to interactive discussion and some parts don't. Obviously the interactive parts apply mostly in those parts of the Gospels where we're talking about personal application or lessons to be learned from the material we cover. *Any questions?*

Okay, let's go to the first page of the text, page 2 as it's numbered in the Harmony. Again, the way this is laid out, where we have parallel accounts I've put it in order, from left to right, of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Where there's material that's found in only one Gospel, it goes all the way across the page as we see here at the beginning.

Feel free to write in this if you'd like to. I gave it pretty large margins so you could do that. However, I'll warn you ahead of time that there will be times, and today is one of them, when there will be far more notes and background material than you'll have space for in the margins. I'd suggest that you might want to keep a separate notebook for your notes, and you might want to copy over only those notes that you think are most relevant and important to you. The most important thing is *that you use this*. That's what it's here for—to use, not just to put on a shelf and occasionally look at.

So let's get started with **Luke 1:1**. Some of this we've already covered in the background to the four Gospel writers, but I'd like to highlight a few things here.

1:1 Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us,

I'll just point out once again that Luke says there were several records of individuals about the life of Christ. Probably a lot of this material started out as memorized oral accounts from the 12 apostles, and now, around 60 A.D., this material is starting to be put down in written form by Luke, a very detail-oriented historian.

Notice that Luke says he's going to write about **“those things which have been fulfilled among us”**—by “fulfilled,” he's saying he's going to talk about how the prophecies of the Messiah, the Christ, were fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth. He's not just writing a biography; he's writing a biography about how Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled what was foretold earlier about the coming of the Messiah.

2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses . . .

So Luke says here that this is his source material—**“those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses.”**

From the beginning of what? Apparently from the beginning of Jesus Christ’s ministry, although he’s actually going to start his story with the circumstances of the birth of John the Baptizer and Jesus.

We also talked last time about the importance of eyewitnesses and how God’s legal system required multiple witnesses to establish the truthfulness of a fact. You had to have a minimum of two or three witnesses to establish a fact as truth. Let’s look at a few verses to back up this claim by Luke that there were eyewitness accounts to these events:

2 Peter 1:16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

So Peter here tells us that he, along with others (because he uses the plural pronoun “we”), were witnesses of Jesus Christ—specifically, as he’s talking about here, of the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountaintop.

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, *which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, the Word of life— 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—*

So the apostle John, both in his Gospel and in this letter, begins with the fact that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. And John was an eyewitness, and there were others who were eyewitnesses, who saw Him, who touched Him, who spent time with Him, who were with Him day in and day out over the course of several years. Like Peter, John uses the plural pronoun “we,” meaning there were other eyewitnesses to these things who could verify what he said.

Acts 1:1-3—The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen,

3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

So again, Luke emphasized the fact that there were eyewitnesses to Jesus and His life and His appearances to the apostles after He had been raised from the dead. He says the fact that there were so many witnesses constitutes “infallible proofs” that He had been raised to life again after being crucified.

So back to **Luke 1:2**, where we were:

2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us,

So Luke says here that his sources were both **“eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.”** So this would indicate that Luke talked to at least several of the 12 apostles other than Matthew and John in preparing his Gospel.

3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus,

And Luke was a man for historical detail. As I mentioned last time, Luke included a lot of detail, including individuals holding a particular office in a particular place at a particular time, and archaeologists have verified a lot of this information.

I mentioned last time that a lot of Bible critics want to redate the Gospels to the early or middle 100s A.D. to say that these couldn't be eyewitness accounts, that these are legends made up decades later, and that Jesus could not have been a prophet when He foretold the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. But Luke's many little details shoot huge holes in that idea. After all, who is going to make up a story a hundred years later and get all of those little details right about so many names and places?

If you were going to make up a story about someone who lived a hundred years ago, how would you go about getting every little detail right when you had no historical records to go on? It's just impossible—unless, as Luke says, you interviewed the people who were personal eyewitnesses to these events and that was your source of information.

Again, we see here that Theophilus was the man to whom both Acts and the Gospel of Luke were addressed. Theophilus, again, means “lover of God” or “God lover,” or, as some sources say, “loved by God.” Obviously people back in the New Testament knew of this man—Luke certainly did—but we don't know anything more about him than the fact that two books of the Bible were written to him and for him.

As for the title “most excellent,” you might write down three verses from the book of Acts where this exact same title is used in addressing the Roman governors Felix and Festus. Those are **Acts 23:26, 24:3 and 26:25**. In two of these places it reads “most noble” in the New King James Version, but the same word is used that is here translated “most excellent.” This is why we think Theophilus, whoever he was, was likely some kind of government official or nobleman or wealthy person of considerable social status.

Concluding here in **Luke 1:4**, Luke explains that he's written this so **4 that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.** So here again is the purpose of Luke's Gospel—*“that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.”*

Now we come to the two genealogies in Matthew and Luke. As noted in the Harmony, the genealogy which Matthew gives is the legal genealogy through Joseph. Luke's is the physical genealogy through Mary.

Luke 3:23-38

23 Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, . . .

You might write down **Numbers 4:46-47**, where 30 is the age at which a Levite began his priestly service. So here Jesus is being consistent with the instruction He Himself had given regarding the Levites in the Pentateuch.

. . . being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, . . .

Of course we know that Jesus' Father was God the Father and His *stepfather* would have been Joseph. In other words, Joseph was not His father as far as the one who conceived Jesus with Mary. And it also says here:

the son of Heli,

Technically speaking, Joseph would be the son-in-law of Heli.

24 the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Janna, the son of Joseph,

25 the son of Mattathiah, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai,

26 the son of Maath, the son of Mattathiah, the son of Semei, the son of Joseph, the son of Judah,

27 the son of Joannas, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri,

28 the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmodam, the son of Er,

29 the son of Jose, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi,

30 the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonan, the son of Eliakim,

31 the son of Melea, the son of Menan, the son of Mattathah, the son of Nathan, the son of David,

And here we see a divergence between Luke's genealogy and Matthew's. Mary is a descendant of David through Nathan, while Joseph is a descendant of David through Solomon.

32 the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon,

33 the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah,

34 the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor,

35 the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah,

36 the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,

37 the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Cainan,

38 the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

Adam is called the son of God because he was created directly by God.

So why do we have this genealogy?

To prove the fulfillment of prophecy, that Jesus the Messiah was a descendant of Abraham as well as a descendant of David.

Now let's take a look at Matthew's genealogy. It has several interesting things that are easy to gloss over unless we're really paying attention.

Matthew 1:1-17

1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

So Matthew, who is writing primarily to a Jewish audience to prove that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah, states up front that Jesus is a descendant of both David and Abraham. And then he proves it from genealogical records. Incidentally, historical sources state that the Jews kept very detailed genealogical records, both in public and in private, and that they were stored in Jerusalem. So possibly Matthew and Luke both accessed these records for their Gospels, or perhaps they got the information from family records and anyone who doubted it could go to the public records in Jerusalem and verify it for themselves.

Again, notice how Matthew introduces the subject of his Gospel, saying this is the genealogy of Jesus Christ. This is why I gave an earlier sermon on the meaning of the words “Jesus Christ”—Jesus meaning “God saves” and Christ meaning the anointed one, the Messiah, and what the different types of anointing meant as they relate to Jesus Christ. We won’t go through that again now, but you may want to review that and keep it in mind every time we come across these words in the Gospels.

- 2 Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers.**
- 3 Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram.**
- 4 Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon.**
- 5 Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse,**
- 6 and Jesse begot David** the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah.
- 7 Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa.**
- 8 Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah.**
- 9 Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah.**
- 10 Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah.**
- 11 Josiah begot Jeconiah** and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon.
- 12 And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel.**
- 13 Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor.**
- 14 Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud.**
- 15 Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob.**
- 16 And Jacob begot Joseph** the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.
- 17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.**

I asked the question in my update last night as to whether, considering the culture of the time, you noticed anything unusual in this list of names. Did you notice anything?

How were women regarded at that time? Not very highly at all. They were basically supposed to be seen and not heard, and often not even seen at all. But Matthew’s genealogy contains *five* different women—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary, or Miriam as she would’ve been called in Hebrew, named after the sister of Moses and Aaron. And the first four of these women are gentiles, which is all the more unusual. And not only that, but one of these women is a harlot, and two are adulteresses.

So what’s the point of them being included? The main lesson here is that of **Galatians 3:28—There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

This shows that even God Himself could make exceptions and use both gentiles and women in His plan to bring the Messiah to earth. And that even a figure as great as king David was the grandson of a gentile woman, a Moabitess by the name of Ruth. The point is that God is willing to accept all, and forgive all and to use all, so we are not to turn any away based on their gender or background. Jesus will ultimately be the Savior of people of all backgrounds.

A few other points to pick up on here:

16 And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.

Notice here that the wording changes from So-and-So begot So-and So to **“Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.”** This signals that Jesus was not conceived as the others were, but it separates it out and says that Jesus was born to Mary or Miriam. And of course, this is because she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit, as we’ll cover when we get to that point in the story.

Let me point out something else, too, that’s easy to overlook. And that is that the Messiah was not just to be the descendant of Abraham and David. He was foretold to be the descendant of several other individuals, too. I’ll just read them off for you:

Genesis 22:18 says the Messiah was to be a descendant of Abraham. God tells Abraham: **“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed . . .”**

Numbers 24:17 says the Messiah was to be a descendant of Jacob. This is Balaam’s prophecy: **“A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel . . .”**

Genesis 49:10 says the Messiah was to be a descendant of Judah: **“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes . . .”**

Isaiah 11:1 says the Messiah was to be a descendant of Jesse: **“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.”**

2 Samuel 7:13 says the Messiah was to be a descendant of David. Through the prophet Nathan God tells David, **“I will establish the throne of his [David’s] kingdom forever.”**

Haggai 2:22-23 says the Messiah was to be a descendant of Zerubbabel: **“I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms. I will overthrow the chariots And those who ride in them; The horses and their riders shall come down, Every one by the sword of his brother.**

23 ‘In that day,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel My servant, the son of Shealtiel,’ says the LORD, ‘and will make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you,’ says the LORD of hosts.”

This is written as though it’s speaking of Zerubbabel himself, but obviously he didn’t do all this, so it’s speaking of his offspring.

And in Matthew’s genealogy, we see all of these individuals listed, fulfilling these prophecies:

Abraham in verse 2,

Jacob in verse 2,

Judah in verse 2,

Jesse in verse 5 and 6,

David in verse 6,

And Zerubbabel in verses 12 and 13.

So the Messiah wasn’t to be just a descendant of Abraham and David, the Messiah had to be a descendant of all these other individuals as well. And Matthew documents that Jesus of Nazareth did fulfill all of these prophecies.

Okay, one final point and question. **Matthew 1:17** ends this genealogy with this: **“So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.”**

That’s an interesting set of statements about the number of generations, but what’s the point? Why throw this in there? Any ideas? What would the number 14 mean?

Have any of you ever heard the term *gematria*? Do you know what it means?

A short definition would be that *gematria* is a term for assigning a symbolic value to numbers. We’re familiar with some of that. For example, we know that in the Bible the numbers 7 and 12 represents completeness and perfection. In contrast, the number 6 represents man or Satan.

In our writing system we have numerals that are separate from our alphabet. But ancient languages didn’t have that. They used letters of the alphabet for numbers also. That sounds strange, but we probably all learned that in school when we learned **Roman numerals**. And what are they? I= 1, V = 5, X = 10, L = 50, C = 100, D = 500, M = 1,000.

The Hebrews used a similar system. They assigned 1 to the equivalent of their letter A, 2 to the equivalent of their letter B, 3 to the equivalent of their letter C, and so on. In their system, their equivalent of the letter D was the fourth letter of their alphabet, so it had a numerical value of 4. Their equivalent of the letter V was the sixth letter of their alphabet, so it had a numerical value of 6.

Matthew is actually using this numerical system to plant a deeper meaning in verse 17. And this isn’t the only place where this happens in the Gospels. It happens at least four times that I know of where the Gospels writers use *gematria* to insert a deeper or hidden message in their text. A good Jewish reader would’ve known to look for things like this because it happens in the Old Testament. But because we don’t know about these things, it goes right over our heads. So what is that hidden meaning here in verse 17?

Let me ask you some questions: *Who was Israel’s most famous king?* David. He was kind of our George Washington, Abe Lincoln and George Patton all rolled into one.

Whose name is mentioned twice here in verse 17? **David.**

How is David’s name spelled in Hebrew, since they didn’t use vowels? **D-V-D.**

What is the numerical value of D-V-D? D = 4, V=6, and D=4.

What is 4 + 6 + 4? **14.** Fourteen is a symbolic way of writing David’s name.

So when Matthew mentions **14 generations** from Abraham to David, and 14 generations from David to the captivity in Babylon, and 14 generations from the captivity until Jesus Christ, what he’s doing is stamping **DAVID, DAVID, DAVID** across this verse. A non-Jewish reader would completely miss that. But a Jewish reader would pick up on that.

What Matthew is saying here, in code you might say, is that Jesus is the prophesied son of David who would sit on David’s throne as King over Israel. How does Matthew introduce Jesus in verse 1? As the Son of David. How does Matthew refer to David in verse 6? As “David the king”—twice. He’s emphasizing the connection between Jesus and David, that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies and promises to David. Now you may be saying that’s just a fluke.

But it's not. In future classes I'll show you where the writer uses this same technique at least three other times.

Any questions?

Class dismissed, and we'll pick it up here next time.