

**“WHAT’S IN A NAME?”**  
**A STUDY ON THE MATTHEAN GENEALOGY**  
**(Mt 1,1-17)**  
**Part One**

Nora Macabasag  
Pontificia Università S. Tommaso D’Aquino in Urbe (Roma)  
macabasag@pust.it

*Título:* “¿Qué significado tiene un nombre?” Un estudio sobre la genealogía mateana (Mt 1,1-17) (Primera parte).

*Resumen:* Inspirada en el estudio de William Subash acerca de los sueños en Mt 1–2 y en el artículo de Ansgar Wucherpfennig sobre la genealogía en el evangelio de Mateo, la autora aborda un nuevo enfoque de la genealogía mateana por medio del estudio de los nombres contenidos en dicho evangelio. El estudio investiga la razón de por qué Mateo seleccionó esos nombres y busca determinar su función en los relatos de la infancia y en el evangelio. Dicho estudio está dividido en dos partes: Primera parte: 1) las fuentes de Mateo; 2) la etimología de los nombres; 3) estructura de las tres partes de la genealogía; 4) adiciones en la genealogía. Segunda parte: 5) las mujeres en la genealogía; 6) nombres cambiados e insertados; 7) lectura simbólica.

*Palabras clave:* Genealogía. Pacto. Patriarcas. Reyes de Judá. Mujeres en la Biblia. Etimología de los nombres en la Biblia. Mesías. Mateo.

*Abstract:* Inspired by the rhetorical study of William Subash on the dreams in Matthew 1–2 and Ansgar Wucherpfennig’s article on the Matthean genealogy, the author launches a new approach to the Matthean genealogy by studying the names therein. The study investigates the reason why Mat-

thew selected these names and seeks to determine their function in the infancy narrative and in the Gospel. It is divided into two parts: I Part: (1) Matthew’s sources, (2) etymology of names, (3) the structure of the three parts of the genealogy, (4) additions in the genealogy. II Part: (5) the women in the genealogy, (6) changed and inserted names, (7) symbolic reading.

*Keywords:* Genealogy. Covenant. Patriarchs. Kings of Judah. Women in the Bible. Etymology of Names in the Bible. Messiah. Matthew.

## Introduction

This study on the Matthean genealogy is an investigation on the names mentioned therein – their etymology and function in the infancy narrative and in the entire Gospel. We shall follow the lead of William J. Susbash’s rhetorical approach to the dreams in the Matthean infancy narratives<sup>1</sup> by exploring the rhetorical qualities of the genealogy, and we shall endeavor to further the study of Ansgar Wucherpfennig<sup>2</sup> on some important issues regarding the genealogy: the sources of Matthew, the selection of names, the reason behind the additions. We shall also answer the question whether Matthew could count,<sup>3</sup> and interpret the change or/and insertion of names.

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<sup>1</sup> SUBBASH, *The Dreams of Matthew 1:18–2:23. Tradition, Form, and Theological Investigation* (Studies in Biblical Literature 149), New York 2012. In this study he demonstrated the dreams as a literary device used by Matthew on purpose to educate his community concerning the paternity of Joseph and the reason for the Holy Family’s journeys. He points out how rhetorical criticism “provides tools to understand the purpose of dreams in Matt 1:18–2:23” (SUBBASH, 151). He quotes George A. Kennedy’s definition of rhetorical criticism. “Rhetorical criticism takes the text as we have it, whether the work of a single author or the product of editing, and looks at it from the point of view of the author’s or editor’s intent, the unified results, and how it would be perceived by an audience of near contemporaries” (KENNEDY, *New Testament Interpretation*, 4).

<sup>2</sup> WUCHERPFENNIG, “Jesus mehr als Salomo”, 713-720.

Wucherpfennig points out the peculiar way Matthew presents the history of Israel in his genealogy, “In diesem Sinn lässt sich die Genealogie als mehrfacher Schlüssel für das Evangelium lesen” (WUCHERPFENNIG, “Jesus mehr als Salomo”, 719) Thus, for him the genealogy is a suitable introduction not only to the infancy narratives but to the entire Gospel as well. He lingers on the Messiah’s being greater than Solomon, thus focusing on the title “Son of David”, but he left out the discussion of the Messiah’s being “Son of Abraham.” In this study, we shall deal with both titles.

<sup>3</sup> “Could Matthew count?” Thus BROWN *The Birth of the Messiah*, 81.

# 1. Matthew's Sources for the Genealogy

## 1.1. From Abraham to David (1,2-6a)

	Matthew	References	Hebrew	LXX <sup>4</sup>
v. 2	<i>Abraam</i>	Gn 17,5	'aḇrāhām	<i>Abraam</i>
	<i>Isaäk</i>	Gn 21	yīṣḥāq	<i>Isaak</i>
	<i>Iakōb</i>	Gn 25	ya'āqōḇ	<i>Iakōb</i>
v. 3	<i>Ioudas</i>	Gn 29,35; 38,1-30	y <sup>e</sup> hūḏāh	<i>Ioudas</i>
	<i>Fáres</i>	Gn 38,29	pereṣ	<i>Fares</i>
	<i>kai Zara</i>	Gn 38,30	zeraḥ	<i>Zara</i>
	<i>ek tēs Thamar</i>	Gen. 38	tāmār	<i>Thamar</i>
v. 4	<i>Hesrôm</i>	Ruth 4,18 1 Chr 2,5 1 Chr 2,9	ḥeṣrôn	<i>Esrôm</i> <i>Arsôn</i> <i>Eserôn</i>
	<i>Aram</i>	Ruth 4,19 1 Chr 2,9 1 Chr 2,10	rām	<i>Arran</i> <i>Ram... kai Aram</i> <i>Aram</i>
	<i>Aminadab</i>	Ruth 4,19; 1 Chr 2,10	'ammīnāḏāḇ	<i>Aminadab</i>
	<i>Naassôn</i>	Ruth 4,20; 1 Chr 2,10	naḥṣôn	<i>Naassôn</i>
v. 5	<i>Salmôn</i>	Ruth 4,20b Ruth 4,21a 1 Chr 2,11	śalmāh śalmôn śalmā'	<i>Salman</i>  <i>Salmôn</i>
	<i>Boes</i>	Ruth 4,21; 1 Chr 2,11	bō'az	<i>Boos</i>
	<i>ek tēs Rajab</i>	Josh 2,1	rāḥāḇ	<i>Raab</i>
	<i>Iōbēd</i>	Ruth 4,21; 1 Chr 2,12	'ōḇēḏ	<i>Ōbēd</i>
	<i>ek tēs Ruth</i>	Ruth 1,4	rūt	<i>Ruth</i>
v. 6a	<i>Iessai</i>	Ruth 4,22; 1 Chr 2,12	yīšay	<i>Iessai</i>
	<i>Dauid</i>	Ruth 4,22 1 Chr 2,15	dāwīḏ dāwīḏ	<i>Dauid</i>

From Abraham to Perez Matthew's source is the book of Genesis, from Hezron to Jessai the book of Ruth and 1 Chronicles. Wucherpennig pointed out that the genealogy from Judah onwards is very near to an existing list such as found in 1 Chronicles chapter 2<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief history of the Greek canon, see FARRUGIA, "Il canone Greco", 9-26.

<sup>5</sup> WUCHERPENNIG, "Jesus mehr als Salomo", 716.

Matthew preferred the changed name of the first patriarch, *Abraham*, “father of multitude of nations” (Gn 17,6). It is assumed that “more likely, Abraham is a mere dialectic variant of Abram, representing the insertion of *h* in weak verbal systems, a phenomenon known from Aramaic and elsewhere”<sup>6</sup>. In fact, the same phenomenon of the insertion of *h* is recorded of Joseph’s name, *yôsēph*, which is found spelled *hōseph*<sup>e</sup>y once<sup>7</sup>, only in Psalm 81,6<sup>8</sup>.

*Aram* – The LXX has Aram (Ruth), alongside Ram and Harran (1 Chr), while the Hebrew has Ram for all three occurrences of the name.

The three names, *Hezron*, *Nahshon*, *Salmon*, ending in *-on*, resemble Canaanite names “in later second millennium B.C.”<sup>9</sup>, thus showing the influence of the surrounding populations. As the narrative in Genesis informs us, the sons of Israel eventually intermarried, like Judah who married a Canaanite (cf. Gn 38,2), bringing to a halt Abraham’s legacy to take for wives only from among their kindred, the Aramaeans (cf. Gn 24,1-9).

The three different forms of *Salmon*’s name – in Ruth *śalmāh* (4,20b) and *śalmôn* (4,21); *śalmā*’ in 1 Chr 2,11 – are variants of the same root *ślm* with suffixes, common in Aramaic attributed to the periods of the wandering in the desert and settlement (not witnessed in the Patriarchs’ period), the suffix *-ôn* may be adjectival or diminutive of the suffix *-āh* or *-’*<sup>10</sup>.

The two spellings of *David*’s name indicate the period in which the respective books were compiled: “generally speaking, those with the three-letter spelling belong to the First Temple period (or not later than the first part of the 6<sup>th</sup> century), while those with the four-letter spelling may be assigned to the Second Temple period”<sup>11</sup>. Interestingly, these two spelling which we find in the historical books *-dwd-* and in the Chroniclers’ books *-dwyd-* correspond to the archeological findings. The Tel Dan inscription, for example, a monument set up by Hazael, king of Damascus in 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C., mentions the “house of David”, where David’s name is spelled

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<sup>6</sup> *EncJud* I, 281.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. EVEN-SHOSHAN, *Concordance*, 448.

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 81 is one of the twelve Asaphic psalms originating from the northern kingdom. GOULDER, *Psalms of Asaph*, 9: “a group of psalms put together [their detail suggested] in the 720s in the northern sanctuary at Bethel, and accepted [with marginal amendments] in Jerusalem thereafter.”

<sup>9</sup> ANDERSEN – HESS, *Names in the Study of Biblical History*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. ZADOK, *Pre-Hellenistic Israelite Anthroponym*, 154-155, 160.

<sup>11</sup> FREEDMAN, “The Spelling of the Name ‘David’”, 102.

with the three letters<sup>12</sup>. It is amazing that as far as changing fashions of Hebrew names are concerned, “The Bible and the archaeological evidence are the same”<sup>13</sup>.

**1.2. From David to the Babylonian Exile (1,6b-11)**

	Matthew	References	Hebrew	LXX
v. 6b	<i>Solomōn</i> <i>ek tēs</i> <i>tou Ouriou</i>	2 Sam 12,24 2 Sam 11,3	š <sup>l</sup> lōmōh (baṭ-šēbaʿ) ʾūrīyāh	<i>Salōmōn</i> ( <i>Bērsabee</i> ) <i>Ourias</i>
v. 7	<i>Roboam</i>	1 Kgs 11,43; 2 Chr 9,31	r <sup>h</sup> ḥabʾām	<i>Roboam</i>
	<i>Abia</i>	1 Kgs 14,31 2 Chr 13,1	ʾābīyām ʾābīyāh	<i>Abiou</i> <i>Abia</i>
v. 8	<i>Asaf</i>	1 Kgs 15,9; 2 Chr 14,1	ʾāsāʾ	<i>Asa</i>
	<i>Iōsafat</i>	1 Kgs 22,41; 2 Chr 17,1	y <sup>h</sup> hōšāphāṭ	<i>Iōsafat</i>
	<i>Iōram</i>	2 Kgs 8,16; 2 Chr 21,1	y <sup>h</sup> hōrām	<i>Iōram</i>
v. 9	<i>Ozias</i>	2 Kgs 14,21 2 Chr 26,1	ʾōzaryāh ʾuzzīyāhū	<i>Azarias</i> <i>Ozias</i>
	<i>Iōatham</i>	2 Kgs 15,7; 2 Chr 27,1	yōṭām	<i>Iōatham</i>
	<i>Ajaz</i>	2 Kgs 15,38; 2 Chr 28,1	ʾāḥāz	<i>Ajaz</i>
v. 10	<i>Hezekias</i>	2 Kgs 16,20; 2 Chr 29,18 2 Kgs 20,10; 2 Chr 28,27	ḥizqīyāhū y <sup>h</sup> ḥizqīyāhū	<i>Ezekias</i>
	<i>Manassēs</i>	2 Kgs 20,21; 2 Chr 33,1	m <sup>h</sup> naššeh	<i>Manassēs</i>
	<i>Amōs</i>	2 Kgs 21,18; 2 Chr 33,21	ʾāmōn	<i>Amōn</i>
v. 11	<i>Iōsias</i>	2 Kgs 21,26; 2 Chr 34,1	yōʾšīyāhū	<i>Iōsias</i>
	<i>Iejonias</i>	2 Kgs 24,6 2 Chr 36,9	y <sup>h</sup> hōyākīn	<i>Iōakim</i> <i>Iejonias</i>

Matthew, who planned to put only fourteen names in each of the sections of his genealogy, skipped six kings (seven if we count the regency of Athalia)<sup>14</sup>. For the name of *Solomon* with reference to his mother, Matthew’s

<sup>12</sup> ANDERSEN – HESS, *Names in the Study of Biblical History*, 8: “The old spelling *dwd*, used in Hazael’s monument, is the spelling used in biblical books from before the Exile, notably Samuel. The later, longer spelling is used exclusively in Chronicles, the same as in the Dead Sea Scrolls”.

<sup>13</sup> *Ib.*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> Seven if we count the regency of Athalia. For a complete list of the kings who ruled in Judah, see BROWN, *Birth*, 78.

source must have been 2 Samuel, but he certainly was not using the Greek, although we may concede that at the time there are many dialectal variants for the pronunciation of the Hebrew names as we have found in *Salmon*. The name of *Abia* tells us that Matthew was using the Chroniclers’ books.

The two names, *Asaph* and *Amos*, in the line of kings have no textual support. We shall deal with the insertion of these names below.

### 1.3. From the Babylonian Exile to Jesus Christ (1,12-16)

	Matthew	References	Hebrew	LXX
v. 12	<i>Salathiël</i>	Ezra 3,2	š'alf'el	<i>Salathiël</i>
	<i>Zorobabel</i>	Ezra 3,2	z'rubbābel	<i>Zorobabel</i>
v. 13 <sup>15</sup>	<i>Abioud</i>		'ābīhūd	
	<i>Eliakim</i>		'elyāqīm	
	<i>Azōr</i>		'azzūr	
v. 14	<i>Sadōk</i>		šādōq	
	<i>Ajīm</i>		yāqīm	
	<i>Elioud</i>		'ēlīhūd	
v. 15	<i>Eleazar</i>		'el'āzār	
	<i>Matthan</i>		mattān	
	<i>Iakōb</i>	(cf. Gn 25)	ya'āqōb	<i>Iakōb</i>
v. 16	<i>Iōsēph</i>	(cf. Gn 30,24)	yōsēph	<i>Iōsēph</i>
	<i>Maria</i>	(cf. Ex 15,20)	miryām	<i>Mariam</i>
	<i>Iēsus</i>	(cf. Josh 1,1)	y'hōšua'	<i>Iēsus</i>
	<i>ho leg Jristos</i>	(cf. Ps 2,2)	m'šr'h	<i>Jristos</i>

Wucherpennig reported that the names between Zerubbabel and Jesus are sometimes held to be imaginative. However, he seems right in thinking that these names must have been copied from a written *Vorlage* which had gone lost<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> From v. 13a to v. 15b the corresponding Hebrew names are taken from the Modern Hebrew version of the New Testament published by a Jewish publishing house, Hope of Israel Publications: *The Hebrew-English New Covenant (New Testament)* (Powder Springs, GA, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> WUCHERPFENNIG, “Jesus mehr als Salomo”, 715: “Man hat daher gelegentlich gemeint, es würde sich hier um Phantasienamen handeln. Das muss aber nicht sein. Sie könnten aus einer schriftlichen Vorlage stammen. Wenn dies der Fall ist, wäre sie verloren gegangen.”

The first two names, *Shealtiel* and *Zerubbabel*, have biblical support, whereas the last two, *Jacob* and *Joseph*, remind us of the patriarch Jacob and his twelve sons, in between are common Jewish names. With Joseph the father-son pattern from Abraham onward is interrupted by his presentation as the husband of Mary of whom Jesus, called Messiah, was born. Joseph is the last in line<sup>17</sup>. The question that comes readily in mind is: who is the father of Jesus? Matthew answers this question in the following narrative unit.

#### 1.4. Hebrew or Greek?

Even if we posit that Matthew wrought his genealogy out of existing genealogies – in fact, the pastoral letters, 1 Timothy and Titus, speak of genealogies in circulation (cf. 1 Tm 1,4 and Tit 3,9)<sup>18</sup> – we still have to ask whether his source-genealogies were in Hebrew or in Greek.

As the table of the first part of the genealogy shows, for the names of Aram and Salmon (1 Chr 2,10-11) Matthew seems to be using the LXX. However, the names of Boaz, Rahab and Obed indicate the opposite, or maybe his source had such (otherwise unknown) spelling of these names.

If with Aram's and Salmon's name in the first part of the genealogy we tend to think that Matthew was using the LXX, with Boaz's name we begin to wonder whether it was indeed so. However, with Rahab's name, we can almost be sure that his source was in Hebrew; for he spelled Ραχαβ, while LXX's spelling is *Raab*<sup>19</sup>, ignoring the "h" as can also be seen in Nahshon's name. LXX's tendency to leave out the gutturals is found again in *Obed*, while Matthew in some way retained the *ayin* with the Greek "y".

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<sup>17</sup> So Wucherpfennig. Cf. WUCHERPFENNIG, 719-720.

<sup>18</sup> The term *genealogia* appears only twice in the New Testament. Cf. W. F. MOULTON – A. S. GEDEN – H. K. MOULTON, *Concordance to the Greek Testament*, 158 (henceforward MGM).

These passages in the Pastoral letters where the author attacks some errors have been subject to different interpretations since late antiquity. See VIVIANO, *Matthew and His World*. In this study the author points out, "it could be said that no other text known to us fits the description of 1 Tim 1:4 as perfectly as does Matt 1-2" (p. 34).

<sup>19</sup> The other two times Rahab is mentioned in the New Testament, Heb 11:31 and Jas 2:25, the spelling is that of the LXX, Ρααβ *Raab*. Cf. MGM, 880.

In the list of kings, aside from the different renderings of LXX and Matthew for Solomon’s name and for the above-featured aspect with respect to the gutturals, there is agreement between the two for the rest of the names which are clearly taken from the books of Chronicles. In the third part Matthew has the same rendering as LXX for all of the names attested in the Old Testament.

Although Matthew shows familiarity with the Greek renderings of Hebrew names this does not necessarily imply that his sources were in Greek, for this does not seem to be the case with some names, especially in the first part of the genealogy. The agreement in spelling between LXX and Matthew, which as shown above is not wholly complete, may be due to the fact that at the time of Matthew the Greek renderings of some Hebrew names were well known, and this may even point to a non-Palestinian origin of the Gospel. The divergences can be explained only if we concede that Matthew’s sources were in Hebrew.

As early as the second century, Origenes reported that the first Gospel was written for Jews who embraced the faith, and that the evangelist had written it in Hebrew<sup>20</sup>. Jerome, speaking of the Hebrew gospel shown to him by the Nazareans, echoed this information in his work on famous men in history<sup>21</sup>. When the early Church promulgated the canon of the New Testament, only the Greek form of Matthew’s Gospel was retained, perhaps as a clear sign of break from Judaism especially of the Jewish Christians, and also because the Greek Old Testament text became the version used in Christian liturgy.

## 2. Etymology of Names<sup>22</sup>

The importance of the names in the study of Scriptures has long been acknowledged by scholars. “The value of a full understanding of the original significance of the proper names in the Bible is beyond any possible computation and measurement, and the literal meaning of these

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<sup>20</sup> ORIGENIS, *Comm. Evang. Sec. Matthæum*, PG 13, I, 829.

<sup>21</sup> HIERONYMUS, *De vir. ill.* 3: “In quo animadvertendum quod ubicumque evangelista sive ex persona sua sive ex Domini Salvatoris veretis scripturae testimoniis abutitur, non sequitur septuaginta translatorum auctoritatem, sed hebraicam.”

<sup>22</sup> References: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon* (henceforward BDB); *EncBib*; *EncJud* (2007<sup>2</sup>); *TDNT*; *TDOT*; also POTTS, *Dictionary of Bible Proper Names*, and GARSIEL, *Biblical Names*.



names is the keynote of this understanding”<sup>23</sup>. So Cyrus Potts wrote almost a century ago, and several years ago Richard Hess stated: “Personal names also play an important role in the narrative texts of the Bible, beyond the mere identification of the characters in the stories. Because Israelite (and non-Israelite) names so often carry a meaning that was easily recognized by the listener or reader in ancient Israel, these names interacted with key words and ideas in the narrative themselves, reinforcing important themes and further establishing the identity of the characters themselves”<sup>24</sup>.

In our survey of the names in the list, we have seen that Matthew is determined by number fourteen. We ask why he chose these very names for his genealogy, for it is our supposition that there must be a reason for such selection. It is therefore necessary to study the meaning of the names in order to understand Matthew’s overriding concerns in this incipit literary unit of the Gospel.

## 2.1. From Abraham to David

*Abraham*, “father of multitude of nations”

*Isaac*, “he will laugh”

*Jacob*, “he will supplant”

*Judah*, “he will be praised”

*Perez*, “breach”

and *Zerah*, “appearance”

by *Tamar*, “palm-tree”<sup>25</sup>

*Hezron*, “enclosure”

*Aram*, “exalted”

*Aminadab*, “my people is noble”

*Nahshon*, “little serpent”

*Salmon*, “peace”, “peace-bearer”

*Booz*, “in might”, “strength”

by *Rachab*, “openness”, “expansion”

*Obed*, “servant”, “worshiper”

by *Ruth*, “sated” (Garsiel), “friend” (as suggested by the Peshitta)<sup>26</sup>

*Jesse*, “existence”, “presence”

*David*, “beloved”

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<sup>23</sup> POTTS, *Dictionary of Bible Proper Names*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> HESS, “Issues in the Study of Personal Names in the Hebrew Bible”, 188.

<sup>25</sup> Her name appears only here in the New Testament. Cf. MGM, 435.

<sup>26</sup> Like Tamar she is mentioned only here in the New Testament. Cf. MGM, 883.

Matthew chose the changed name of the patriarch, *Abraham* – from Abram “exalted father” – a compound name, *am* “father” and *ram* “exalted”<sup>27</sup> – to Abraham “father of multitude of nations” (Gn 17,6). There is “wordplay”<sup>28</sup> in the changed name and its explanation; yet, there is difference between the letters forming the name and the explanations attached to it<sup>29</sup>. Moshe Garsiel points, “how far the biblical narrator may exploit his freedom of creativity,” so that “a correlation between them and certain incidents is established”<sup>30</sup>.

A metathesis of the second and third letters of *Salmon*’s name has been suggested, thus *šimlāh*, “garment, clothing”<sup>31</sup>, from *šml* “enclose, envelope”<sup>32</sup>. But this is unnecessary because during the period of settlement there are different ways of pronouncing the sibilants<sup>33</sup> among the Israelites as recorded in the famous story of *šibboleṭ* (Judg 12,6).

The form of the name of David’s father, *yišay*, *Jesse*, is similar to the name of *šāray*, *Sarai*<sup>34</sup>, both ending in “y”. The name Jesse from the particle of existence *yēš* + pron. suff. 1° sing., “I exist, I am present,” is an acclamation of one’s presence.

The list of names in the first part of the genealogy begins with “the father of multitude of nations” and ends with “the Beloved”, the King, from openness to a narrowing. The names have no theophoric meaning.

<sup>27</sup> Compound names with ‘b are common before the I millennium, they “ceased to be current after the Exile”. GRAY, *Studies in Hebrew Proper Names*, 224.

<sup>28</sup> HESS, “Issues in the Study of Personal Names”, 175.

<sup>29</sup> Thus Moshe Garsiel argues concerning the changed names in the Bible with an explanation attached to it, like Abraham’s: “It is explicated in terms of ‘b *hmwn* *gwym* (father of multitude of nations). The word *ab* (father) exploits the first syllable of the name; the second syllable, the letter *r*, does not figure in the explanation at all; and the third, *hm*, is interpreted as *hmwn* (multitude), which involves the adding on of two more letters to make up the word. These and other instances of change in grammatical form or of dropping or taking on of letters when names are to be explained indicate that a flexible “literary” etymology is at work which takes no account of linguistic differences between a name and the explanation proposed for it.” (GARSIEL, *Biblical Names*, 18).

<sup>30</sup> *Ib.*, 18.

<sup>31</sup> So POTTS, *Dictionary*, 207, and BDB 969, 971.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. BDB, 971.

<sup>33</sup> See the study of Giovanni GARBINI, “The Phonetic Shift of Sibilants in Northwestern Semitic in the First Millennium B.C.”

<sup>34</sup> HARDUF, *Biblical Proper Names*, 48: “At first *Sarai* was a princess of only her own people (שָׂרַי = my princess), but later she became a princess (*rhs*) of all the world”.

## 2.2. From David to the Babylonian Exile

*Solomon*, “peace”, “peace-bearer”

by that (*Bathsheba*) of *Uriah*, “YH[WH] is my light”

*Rehoboam*, “expansion of people,” “the people is enlarged”<sup>35</sup>

*Abijah*, “YH[WH] is my father” (his other name is *Abijam*, “father of sea” or “sea man”)

*Asaph*, “[YHWH] gathered”, in place of *Asa* “[YHWH] healed”, “healer”

*Jehoshaphat*, “YHWH has judged”

*Joram*, “YHWH is exalted”

*Uzziah*, “YHWH is my strength” (his other name *Azariah*, “YHWH has helped”)

*Jotham*, “YH[WH] is perfect”

*Ahaz*, “[YHWH] has grasped”, “[YHWH] holds fast”

*Hezekiah*, “YHWH has strengthened”, “YHWH strengthens”

*Manasseh*, “[YHWH] makes [me] forget” (cf. Gn 41,51)

*Amos*, “burden” in place of *Amon* “firm”, “faithful”

*Josiah*, “YH[WH] will support”

*Jechoniah*, “YHWH will establish”

In the second part of the genealogy most names are compounds with the name of the God of Israel. “From the time of David onwards (c. 1010 B.C.), Yahwistic names become increasingly popular, with preference for fuller forms, whether beginning with *yhw-* or ending with *-yhw*”<sup>36</sup>.

The list begins with David’s son, *Solomon*, by the wife of *Uriah* and ends with *Jechoniah* at the time of the Babylonian exile. Wucherpennig pointed in his study how Matthew traces the fall of the kingdom of Judah back to David’ twofold breaking of the Decalogue<sup>37</sup>. Nonetheless, the name of the last king in the list is a cry of hope.

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<sup>35</sup> GRAY, *Studies in Hebrew Proper Names*, 59-60: “Hebrew analogy does not favour interpreting ‘*m*’ by ‘kinsman’. [...] If a case could be made out independently for the god ‘‘Amm’ we might well connect the name *rhb’m* with his (cf. *rhbyh*, a name, however, peculiar to Chronicles). But this is unnecessary; it is certainly probable enough that Solomon recorded the national prosperity of his time in naming his son “The people is enlarged”.

<sup>36</sup> ANDERSEN – HESS, *Names in the Study of Biblical History*, 14.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. WUCHERPFENNIG, “Jesus mehr als Salomo”, 718-719.

### 2.3. From Babylonian Exile to Jesus

*Salathiel*, “I have asked God [of him]”

*Zerubbabel*, “offspring of Babylon”

*Abiud*, “my father is glorious”

*Eliakim*, “God will set up”

*Azor*, “helped [by God]”

*Zadok*, “righteous”

*Achim*, “[God] will establish”

*Eliud*, “my God is glorious”

*Eleazar*, “God has helped”

*Matthan*, “gifts”, “offerings”

*Jacob*, “he will supplant”

*Joseph*, “he will increase”, the husband of

*Mary*<sup>38</sup>, “bitter sea”, “lady” of whom

*Jesus*, “[God] saves”, was born, called the “Messiah”, “Anointed”

This third list begins with David’s descendant in exile and his son born in Babylon down to Jesus, the awaited Messiah. The names in between are common Jewish names without any biblical support. If Matthew included these otherwise unknown names in his genealogy, there must be a reason.

As for the names of *Aram*, *Asaph* and *Amos*, it is our aim in this study to try to answer why Matthew changed the attested names.

### 3. The structure of the Three Parts of the Genealogy

The division of the genealogy into three parts indicates that “with the birth of Jesus a new era of salvation history has begun”<sup>39</sup>. Each of the three parts of the genealogy can be divided into two. Matthew’s magical number “fourteen” is the sum of seven plus seven.<sup>40</sup> This pattern of two

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<sup>38</sup> Also the name of a prophet and sister of Aaron (cf. Ex 15,20).

<sup>39</sup> VIVIANO, “Making Sense of the Matthean Genealogy”, 91.

<sup>40</sup> Number fourteen is widely assumed as the sum of the consonants of David’s name in Hebrew, and as shown above, there are two spellings for David depending on the period it is written. This assumption then holds that the number fourteen derives from the older spelling *dwd*. Concerning this idea, see KILGALLEN, *Wealth of Revelation*, 68-69. However, Harrington seems right in saying: “The number fourteen in Matthew is better connected with its function as a multiple of seven” (HARRINGTON, *Matthew*, 30).

sets of seven has a parallel in the genealogy of Mesopotamian literature where we can find seven pairs of names – seven *apkallus* (sages) and the kings of their times – before the flood<sup>41</sup>. In the biblical account of the flood, Noah had to introduce seven pairs of animals into the arc in order to survive (cf. Gn 7,1-5).

Number seven is the symbolic number of God's covenant<sup>42</sup>. Number two is hinted at by the twin brothers, Perez and Zerah. However, in Matthew number two does not simply imply a pair, for in the Gospel this number stands for two distinct or opposite individuals (even the disciples are not sent out to preach “two by two” as in Mk 6,7) yet complementing or completing each other, in the same way Jesus' teachings regarding the Law does not cancel the old, for the old remains and the new brings it to perfection.

### 3.1. First Part: The Founding Fathers (vv. 2-6a)

The first part of the genealogy is the list of the names of the founding fathers of the Israelite people, and it can be divided into two groups of seven. This division is based on their movements. The first seven moved from Ur to Canaan (*Abraham*), where they pitched their tent (*Isaac, Jacob, Judah*), then moved down to Egypt (*Perez, Hezron, Aram/Ram*). The second group of seven moved out from Egypt (*Amminadab, Nahshon*), entered and settled in Canaan (*Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse*) until the rise of monarchy (*David*). This part of the genealogy is fashioned to show how the promise given to Abraham, that his descendants would be numerous and that from him would issue kings, is fulfilled in David.

The first patriarch is mentioned with his changed name, Abraham, “father of multitudes”. Isaac, not his firstborn Ishmael, is found in the ge-

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. WILSON, *Genealogy and History*, 149-151.

<sup>42</sup> The importance of number seven is expressed in these terms by WHITE, *The Symbolic Numbers of Scripture*, 55: “It would indeed be a work of supererogation to go over all the places of the Bible where it occurs, in order to make out that it has a deep significance. From the time when the seventh day received the special seal of heaven, down through the ages when the rainbow with its seven hues shone forth as an emblem of grace, and circumcision came to be imperative after seven days, and the sprinklings of water and blood were seven times performed, and the Passover and the Feast of the Weeks, and the Feast of the Tabernacles, and the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee, all were arranged in harmony with the number Seven, there was continual reference to the meaning of the symbol. The Bible begins with a series of seven; it ends in the Apocalypse with the perfect development and flowering of this number.”

nealogy, for it is to Isaac that the blessing given to Abraham has been passed on, which in turn has been given to Jacob and not to his elder brother Esau. Among his twelve sons, Jacob gives the blessing of primacy over his brothers and the scepter to his fourth son Judah. Perez, the second of twin brothers, was among those who descended to Egypt. The name of his son, Hezron, "enclosure", betokens their permanence in Egypt. His son's name is Ram, but changed by Matthew in *Aram*, the place where Abraham and his kinsmen lived before Abraham set forth at the Lord's command. The first seven names, therefore, with the first and the last one changed, trace a circular movement from the starting point, Ur, back to Aram, whence a new journey is about to begin, once again towards Canaan.

Amminadab, whose name means "my people is noble", is the first mentioned in the second set of seven. His daughter Elisheba became Aaron's wife (cf. Ex 6,23). Intermarriage among the different tribes was allowed. The name of his son, Nahshon, "(little) serpent", seems to reveal the influence of the neighboring peoples who named their children "after the beasts of the field"<sup>43</sup>, even giving to the newborn the name of disgusting creatures "in order to express the hope that he might become thoroughly unwelcome to his foes"<sup>44</sup>. His name reminds us of the "bronze serpent" (cf. Nm 21,8-9).

Salmon must be an older form of *š'ēmōh Solomon*<sup>45</sup>, from *šlm* "be complete, sound"<sup>46</sup>, *šālōm* "welfare, peace"<sup>47</sup>, and the name reflects the people's enjoying peace and tranquility in the land of Canaan.

The name of David's father, *Jesse*, which means "presence", aptly designates the one who is going to provide a king in place of Saul. The first part of the genealogy culminates in Jesse's son, David, *the king*.

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<sup>43</sup> GRAY, *Studies in Hebrew Proper Names*, 99.

<sup>44</sup> *Ib.*, 100, quoting Nöldeke. Thus we read in NÖLDEKE, "Anzeigen: W. Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage*", 160: "Es ist doch wohl auch sehr natürlich, dass die im Freien lebenden Beduinen ihre neugeborenen Kinder gern nach den Thieren des Feldes benennen! Dazu wählten sie nicht bloss die starken und edlen, sondern das Kind wurde auch wohl nach allerlei hässlichen Gethier „Mistkäfer“ (*Ġu'al*, *Ġu'ail*), "Zecke" [...] u.s.w. genannt, theils einfach in unzarter Vergleichung des kleinen unschönen Kerls mit jenen Insecten, theils wohl auch, um auszudrücken, dass er seinem Feinden recht unangenehm werden möge, wie schon die alten Philologen bemerkt haben, dass in diesem Sinne die beliebten Benennungen nach bitteren und dornigen Pflanzen stattfanden".

<sup>45</sup> On the sibilants, see GARBINI, "The Phonetic Shift of Sibilants".

<sup>46</sup> Cf. BDB, 1022.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. BDB, 1022-1023.

### 3.2. Second Part: The Kings (vv. 2b-11)

This part of the list of kings can be divided into two equal parts like the preceding one. The first half begins with the successor of David, *Solomon*, and ends with *Uzziah*, the only one of the sons of the king of Judah able to escape the massacre at the hand of Athalia. The names of each of the first seven kings represent a pivotal period in the Kingdom of Judah: *Rehoboam* – the division of the kingdom into two, and *Jehoshaphat* and his son *Joram* – the (undeclared) attempt to unity. Three kings are skipped, plus the regency of Athalia. With *Uzziah* Matthew resumes the line of the kings. The second set of seven names represents the time when reformation was affected, albeit not in every reign, ending with the Babylonian exile. In this latter half Matthew skips other two kings before the Exile. The last king of Judah mentioned in the historical books, *Zedekiah*, a puppet king placed on the throne by the Babylonians who died in exile, is not included in the genealogy. Thus, the monarchs omitted by Matthew amounts to seven.

The omitted names in the line of kings suggest the reason behind the selection of names. In the first half the omitted names of the monarchs – four including Athalia’s regency – are of those involved in issues with the kingdom of Samaria, in the second half, Matthew omitted the deposed and puppet kings, at the hand of Egypt and of Babylon respectively. Seven kings in all, including Athalia’s regency, are omitted by Matthew. Thus the line of kings in Matthew is composed with the purpose of focusing our attention entirely on the Davidid lineage, for the reader must see how the promise given to Judah materialized despite interventions from without. But, alas, the end of the line of kings reveals to be as gloomy as the beginning of this part of the genealogy. The name of the first king is presented with a reminder of the double sin of David. It comes as no surprise then that the line of the kings of Judah closes with a sad finale, the exile.

As said above, the presentation of Solomon in the genealogy in connection with David’s sinful act is an ominous incipit to the line of kings. No hint of tranquility during his reign; rather, Matthew seems to suggest that peace in the land has already been their lot since the time of his ancestor, Salmon. Solomon’s son, *Rehoboam*, caused the secession of the northern tribes, and he brought to an end the glorious years of united kingdom. His son *Abijah*, faced Jeroboam and accused him of attacking his father while he was young and tenderhearted. Abijah’s army prevailed against Israel, “because they relied upon the God of their fathers” (2 Chr 13,18b). His son *Asa* succeeded him, and at the time great numbers deserted from

Israel. To prevent anyone from going to the king of Judah, Baasha of Israel built Ramah. For all response, Asa brought gifts to Ben-Hadad king of Syria that he might break his league with King Baasha. This act has been rebuked by the seer Hanani, because he relied on the king of Syria and not on the Lord (cf. 2 Chr 16,7). In the thirty-ninth year of his reign he was diseased in the feet, yet even then he did not seek the Lord. He died two years later and his son *Jehoshaphat* succeeded him. The Lord was with him. He removed the high places in Judah. After some years he went to Ahab in Samaria and even went to battle with him. When the Moabites and Ammonites and inhabitants of mount Seir attacked him, he prayed to the Lord who fought for them. But after this he joined king Ahaziah of Israel, who did wickedly. His son *Joram* succeeded him.

Joram, the firstborn of Jehoshaphat, put to the sword all his brothers at his accession to the throne. He was married to the daughter of King Ahab, *Athalia*, and he lived like the kings of Israel. When his enemies came to attack him, they took away his sons and wives, leaving behind only the youngest son, *Ahazia*, the first of the three kings of Judah skipped by Matthew (plus the regency of Athalia). King Ahazia was slain together with King Joram of Israel by Jehu, anointed king by one of the company of Elisha. His mother Athalia seized the power and killed all his sons, only the youngest, *Joash*, escaped. The priest Jehoiada reared him until the time he began to reign, but after the death of the priest who guided him in the ways of the Lord, he turned to idols. After the king’s defeat in battle with Syria, his own servants conspired against him and slew him in his bed. His son *Amaziah* succeeded him. He slew the servants who killed his father. He gathered mighty men from Judah and Benjamin, and even hired warriors from Israel. He worshiped the gods of the Edomites whom he defeated in battle, and then wanted to fight against Joash of Israel, who asked him to desist. Joash defeated him and brought away the treasures of the temple and the king’s palace. Amaziah was killed by his servants, and his son *Uzziah* succeeded him.

Matthew resumes the line of kings with *Uzziah*. As long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper. But he became proud, and he transgressed against the Lord. He wanted to burn incense in the temple despite the warning of the priests, who reminded him that only the sons of Aaron are consecrated for this task. He became a leper on the spot before the priests, and he remained a leper until his death. Uzziah is the last of the first set of seven kings in the second part of the genealogy.

The second set of seven kings begins with *Jotham*. He succeeded his father Uzziah. He did not enter in the temple, but the people remained corrupt.



He prevailed over the Ammonites. His son *Ahaz* reigned after him. He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. When Rezin king of Syria and Pekah king of Israel marched against him, he sought the help of Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. He had a copy of the altar he saw in Damascus be built in Jerusalem. At that time the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah (cf. 2 Kings 17,13). Ahaz's son *Hezekiah* succeeded him. The Lord made him prosper. In the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel and sixth of Hezekiah, Samaria was taken (cf. 2 Kings 18,10). In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up to Jerusalem, and Hezekiah had to pay tribute to Assyria. Then he sent to all Israel and Judah to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. When he was ill, Isaiah was sent to him that he might put order in his house because he was about to die. After pleading the Lord, fifteen years were added to his life. Babylonians came to visit him during his illness, and to them Hezekiah showed all the treasures of his kingdom. Isaiah rebuked him for this and prophesied that one day everything his fathers laid up and his descendants would be carried to Babylon. His son *Manasseh* succeeded him. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, for he built up again the high places his father had destroyed. He is blamed for the fall of Judah (cf. 2 Kings 21,10-15). He shed innocent blood, besides leading the people to sin against the Lord. His son *Amon* (not Amos as Matthew has written) reigned after him. He trespassed more and more. His servants conspired against him and killed him in his own house. The people of the land slew the conspirators and made his son *Josiah* king.

Josiah did what was right before the Lord and walked in the way David did. He purged Judah and Jerusalem of the high places. On the eighteenth year of his reign, he ordered the repair of the house of the Lord. It was then that the book of the Law was found. The prophetess Huldah was enquired and she declared that evil would befall the land but the king would not see it. King Josiah commanded all the people to celebrate the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread seven days. Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn from his great wrath, for his anger was kindled against Judah on account of the provocations made by Manasseh (cf. 2 Chr 23,26). Josiah died in battle in Meghiddo. He was slain by Pharaoh Necho, who, according to the Chronicler, wanted him to desist (cf. 2 Chr 35,21). His son *Jehoahaz* reigned after him, but he was deposed by the king of Egypt and brought to Egypt where he died. His brother Eliakim, whose name was changed into *Jehoakim*, was placed on the throne in his stead and he paid tribute of silver and gold to pharaoh. His son *Jechoniah* reigned after him. The two sons of Josiah, Jehoahaz and Jehoakim, are skipped by Matthew.

Jechoniah did what was evil in God’s sight. On the eighth year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar took the king, together with his mother, the princes and the officers, and carried out all the treasures of the house of God and of the king’s house to Babylon, even all the able men; none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land (cf. 2 Kings 24,12-14). He is the last king mentioned in the line of kings in the Matthean genealogy. The king of Babylon made his father’s brother, Mattaniah, king and changed his name to *Zedekiah* (cf. 2 Kings 24,17).

The first half of the list of kings begins with Solomon, who inherited a united kingdom from the hands of his father David. Solomon’s son, *Rehoboam*, whose name reflects the numerous people in his kingdom caused the division, which never healed, even when the kings of Judah and Samaria went to battle together and a daughter of Ahab became wife of King Joram of Judah. *Uzziah* marks the dénouement of this failure of unity. Added to this is King *Uzziah*’s haughty attempt to grasp the prerogative of the priests, to burn incense in the temple.

The second set of seven kings begins with *Jotham*, “YHWH is perfect”, who respected the prerogative of the priests. After him attempt to reformation was taken now and then, but this was outweighed by the kings’ idolatrous practices and wickedness. Warnings of the prophets unheeded, the king and the people went to exile. Nevertheless, the last king’s name, *Jechoniah*, brings a thread of hope, “YHWH will establish”. The kings of Judah failed to establish a kingdom worthy of being called *God’s people* among the nations. So the Lord himself will establish His kingdom on earth. And so we are prepared for the last part of the genealogy.

### **3.3. Third Part: The Exiled, the Unknown<sup>48</sup> and the Messiah (vv. 12-16)**

The first seven names of this part begins with Jehoiachin’s son, *Saltiel*, and ends with the otherwise unknown descendant of the royal house of David, *Achim*, a shortened form of Jehoiachin, the second set of seven begins with the otherwise unknown *Elihud* down to *Jesus*, the thirteenth and last name in the list. The first name is a father’s plea in exile

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<sup>48</sup> R. BROWN in his article, “Son of David, Son of God. Why the Infancy Narratives were written,” called this part “The otherwise *unknown people*”. Thus he writes: “After the Babylonian Exile, Matthew gives us the unknown figures whose names follow Zerubbabel until Joseph – people too insignificant to have ‘made it’ into the pages of biblical history”.

for a descendant; no matter how bad things look like, hope for the future remains glowing. The second name, *Zerubbabel*, “offspring in Babylon”, gives witness that the exiled are even growing in number. He is mentioned among the first returnees, thus his name is a constant reminder of his being born in the land of banishment. Interestingly, the last name of the first seven is *Achim*, a shortened form of Jehoiachin. It is curious that the names after *Zerubbabel* seem to remind the reader of the patriarchs down to the exile. If this is true, then what we find here is the history *in nuce* of God’s people.

*Abihud*, “my father is glorious”, recalls the great father of the multitude and example of unshaken faith, Abraham. His descendants who went down to Egypt were helped by God – thus, the next name, *Azor*, “helped [by God]” – delivering them from slavery to settle in the Promised Land. The name *Zadok*, “righteous”, evokes the time of David and Solomon<sup>49</sup>, whom the faithful priest *Zadok* served. *Achim*, the next in line, calls to mind the Exile, but his name signifies a promise, “[God] will establish”, for God is about to establish not the kingdom of Judah but His kingdom in the person of Jesus Christ. This must be the reason why Matthew sketches once again the history of his people.

It is right, then, that the second half of the third part begin with a name that confesses God’s greatness. The first name which parallels *Abihud*, is *Elihud*, “my God is glorious”, for He always hearkens to the voice of His people in distress – thus, the following name, *Eleazar*, “my God helped”. He is sending them a Gift – *Mattan*, “gift” – which will supplant – *Jacob*, “he will supplant” – all the gifts God endowed His people with, the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, who will increase (*Joseph*, “he will increase”). He comes to save his people from their sins.

Jesus’ name is the thirteenth in line. Messiah is his title. He is the awaited Messiah, grafted onto the line of David through Joseph, the husband of his mother Mary. He will come again at the end of time as king and judge of humankind. These two moments must have been equated by Matthew to two “generations”, in the sense of periods, both regarding the person of Jesus Christ: the first coming of the Son of God in humility by putting on the human nature, and the second coming of the Son of Man in his glory.

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<sup>49</sup> One of the two priests left by David in Jerusalem when Absalom seized the throne was *Zadok* (cf. 2 Sam 15,24-29). Later, he did not join Adonijah’s conspiracy against Solomon, anointed king by both *Zadok* and *Nathan* (cf. 1 Kings 1,38-40). The high priesthood of his descendants became established after the exile (Ezek 40,46; 43,19; 44,15; 48,11).

Thus bringing to fourteen the number of generations after the exile.<sup>50</sup> The gap between his first and second coming may be compared to the gaps found in the first and second parts of the genealogy. In this sense the Matthean genealogy embraces the entire history of salvation until the end of time, just as his Gospel begins and ends with the promise of God’s presence among us.

## 4. Additions in the Genealogy

### 4.1. “Judah and his brothers” and “Jechoniah and his brothers”

The phrase “Judah and his brothers” appears in Gn 44,14. Its context is the descent to Egypt of Jacob’s sons at the time of famine in the land of Canaan. This was the second time they were descending to buy grain, this time together with their youngest brother Benjamin. Having found the silver cup of the lord of the land, Joseph, the cup he uses for divination (cf. Gn 44,5), in Benjamin’s sack, “*Judah and his brothers* came to Joseph’s house while he was still there; and they fell to the ground before him” (Gn 44,14)<sup>51</sup>. At their first coming to take provisions, they had been thrown into prison accused of being spies, and they interpreted the moment as a reckoning for the blood of their brother Joseph (cf Gn 42,6-22). Now, at the prospect of losing the only beloved son left to their father, they begged that the boy be brought back to his father and Judah offered to be taken in his stead saying, “I fear to see the suffering that would come upon my father” (Gn 44,34b). This care for Jacob-Israel of the son who lost almost all of his three sons – two sons died and only Shelah remaining to him – must be one of the reasons that made Judah earn the blessing of primacy over his brothers and a promise of a scepter that would never be taken (cf. Gn 49,8-10).

The phrase “*Jechoniah and his brothers*”, on the other hand, has no biblical support, and must be Matthew’s invention to balance the first

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<sup>50</sup> This reading cannot be precluded altogether as Jesus himself speaks of the coming of the Son of Man at the end of time. *Pace* Brown (cf. *Birth*, 83) and Harrington (cf. *Matthew*, 30).

<sup>51</sup> Judah, the fourth son, has been picked out, not the first born, who disqualified himself by laying with his father’s concubine, Rachel’s maid, Bilhah, a grievous offense of usurping the father’s place (cf. Gn 35,22). Israel gave credit to the words of Judah who would take care of the youngest son, and not Reuben’s, who offered to give the life of his two sons in place of Benjamin’s if he were not brought back to his father.

phrase. Compared to the first phrase's context, this latter phrase recounts the deportation of the king together with his mother and the court officials. There is no mention of siblings and so we take "brothers" in its broader sense of "kinsmen" or "fellow countrymen"<sup>52</sup>. "Jechoniah and his brothers" were taken prisoners – not for three days like the sons of Jacob but seventy years (cf. 2 Chr 36,20-21) – and brought to Babylonia, where they stayed until the edict of Cyrus allowing the Jewish exiles to return to the land of Israel and to rebuild the temple (cf. 2 Chr 36,22-23; Ezra 1). As seen above, the second part of the genealogy begins with David's double breaking of the Decalogue and ends with the deportation of "Jechoniah and his brothers," a climax-retribution for the transgressions, division, and oppression of the people by the hands of the kings of Judah.

The formula "*x* and his brothers" appears twice. "*Einmal ist keinmal*"<sup>53</sup>. Both groups of brothers are taken prisoners for a period of time with symbolic meaning: three days of prison for "Judah and his brothers" – three, which is the symbolic number of God<sup>54</sup>, hints at a revelation, for indeed Joseph will reveal himself to his brothers, and this moment has already been revealed in a dream beforehand, and the breached brotherhood is patched up by reconciliation; seventy years for "Jechoniah and his brothers" – seven times ten: seven being the symbolic number of God's covenant<sup>55</sup> and ten, the sum of three and seven, is the symbolic number of completeness, completion and perfection<sup>56</sup> – signifying the span of time in which the retribution for the people's transgressions of God's covenant is completed.

From "Judah and his brothers" up to the time of "Jechoniah and his brothers" a new internal structure is drawn up: the two phrases form a frame encompassing twenty-four generations – the sum of two sets of

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<sup>52</sup> Here *adelfos* translates the Hebrew *'āḥ*. "The root *'ach* is common Semitic root; it signifies first of all a person's own blood brother, but it also has the broader meaning of kinsman, fellow countryman, companion, etc." (RINGGREN, "*h*", 188). The meaning still holds true in the New Testament. "In the NT *adelfos* and *adelfē* denote either 'physical brotherhood' in the strict sense or more generally the 'spiritual brotherhood' of Israelites or Christians" (VON SODEN, *adelfos*, 144). "In the more general sense in the NT denotes 'fellow-Christians' or 'Christian brothers'" (*ib.*, 145).

<sup>53</sup> BÄHR, *Symbolik des Mosaischen Cultus*, 205.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *ib.*, 206.

<sup>55</sup> The people of Israel need to observe the commandment to sanctify the seventh day (cf. Exod 20,11), for it is the symbol of the covenant's holiness, making Israel a "holy nation" (cf. Exod 19,5-6). Cf. *ib.*, 237.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. BÄHR, *Symbolik*, 230.

twelve generations. Twelve is the symbol of the people of Israel<sup>57</sup>. The first set of twelve begins with Perez, who broke through before his brother Zerah, and ends with Rehoboam, who caused the secession, leading to the division of the kingdom into two. The second set of twelve traces David’s successors to the throne, leaving out the successions on the throne in the Samaritan kingdom; it begins with the son of Rehoboam, Abijah, whose name means “YH[WH] is my father,” and ends with another descendant of David also bearing a theophoric name, Jechoniah, “YH[WH] will establish”, reigning when the Judahite kingdom fell, and experienced exile. These two sets of twelve reflect the history of the people from the wandering to the settling in the Promised land, and the rise of the monarchy followed shortly by the division of the kingdom, the successions on the throne of David – not mentioning the northern kingdom and the Assyrian invasion – down to its downfall. As the saying goes: United we stand, divided we fall.

Wucherpennig pointed out that Jesus Christ’s name is the twelfth in line after Zerubbabel, one of the first home-comers from the exile<sup>58</sup>. Destruction is not the last word in the history of God’s people. God does not forsake his people forever, although he chastises them because they must be holy as He is holy. He led his people back to the Land of promise by the decree of Cyrus. He will gather his weary people and heal the sick in the person of Jesus, who comes to carry the burden of our sins. He will come again in his glory at the end of the world.

If the first two twelve’s bespeak breached brotherhood and destruction, the third time we can trace the number it conveys hope, for it brings about two events of return – first, with Zerubbabel, of the exile returning to their homeland; second, with Jesus Christ, pointing to his second coming as king and judge at the end of time.

#### 4.2. “Perez and Zerah”

The genealogical line proceeds with Perez, but he is first introduced with his twin brother, Zerah. Before these twin brothers, twins had been born to their ancestors Isaac and Rebecca, Esau and Jacob, but they are not mentioned together in the genealogy. Why did Matthew put the names of the latter twin brothers in the genealogy and not the first ones’?

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<sup>57</sup> The twelve sons of Jacob, the twelve tribes of Israel. Cf. *ib.*, 247.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. WUCHERPFENNIG, “Jesus mehr als Salomo”, 715.

The narrative account related to the birth of the twin brothers, Perez and Zerah, provides an explicit explanation of the name given to Perez, from the verb *prš*, “to breach”<sup>59</sup>, for he broke through his brother, but an explanation of Zerah’s name is lacking. Garsiel thinks that we can find it “in the thread bound onto Zerah’s hand (cf. Is 1,18), for *zrh* means the rising or shining of the sun, and it has a connotation of “redness” (from the color of the sky at dawn)”<sup>60</sup>. The “appearance” of the firstborn after his twin brother is implied in the name. This is another instance in which the firstborn is dislocated in the story. Indeed, Genesis is hardly a book of firstborns.

The derivation of Perez’s name, from the verb “breach”, brings to mind a city whose walls are breached and so open to the attacks of the enemies. The verb is used in the oracles of doom, like the one in the famous Song of the Vineyard, *pārōš g<sup>e</sup>dērō w<sup>e</sup>hāyāh l<sup>e</sup>mirmās*, “I will break down its wall, and it shall become a trampling” (Isa 5,5). The Asaphic Psalm 80, reports the fulfillment of this oracle and the psalmist asks: “Why did you break down her [the vine’s] walls, so that all who pass the way pluck her [fruit]” (Ps 80,13). Even Psalm 60 echoes the lament, yet it ends with hope: “O God, you have rejected us, *broken out upon us*, you have been angry – You will take us back” (Ps 60,3). The most distinctive use of the verb is found in the book of the prophet Micah, where we read that God will gather the remnant of his people like a sheep in a fold (cf. Mic 2,12) and will walk at their head: “*The one breaking through (happōrēs)* will go up before them; *they will break through (pār<sup>e</sup>šû)* and will pass through the gate and go out by it; their king will pass before them, YHWH at their head” (Mic 2,13). This is fulfilled when God sent His Son to the world, breaking through the soiled curtain of the history of his people to become God with us. His coming is prefigured in Perez’s name, whereas Zerah’s name indicates his presence.

The name of Zerah is derived from the verb *zrh* “to rise, come forth,” also “to shine”<sup>61</sup> used of the heavenly bodies: of the sun (Gn 32,31; Ps 104,22) metaphorically, of the sun of justice shining for those who fear God’s name (Mal 3,20), and ultimately of God, who blesses his beloved people (cf. Deut 33,2), who will rise upon his people for his glory to be seen upon them (cf. Isa 60,2).

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. BDB, 329. For the occurrences of the name and the verb, see EVEN-SHOSHAN, *Concordance*, 963-964.

<sup>60</sup> GARSIEL, *Biblical Names*, 33.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. BDB, 280. For the occurrences of the name and the verb, see EVEN-SHOSHAN, *Concordance*, 339-340.

Zerah’s name denotes appearance, or an advent, like the Lord’s coming proclaimed in the book of Malachi, which Matthew cites as he presents the messenger of God, John, who announces the coming of the one after him, who is more powerful than he – whose sandals he is not fit to carry and will baptize with Holy Spirit and fire (Mt 3,7). The first feature of the one coming after John is suggested in the last parable given by Jesus in the Gospel, the parable of the wedding banquet (Mt 22,1-14). The one coming after John is *the Son whose wedding is being prepared by his Father*. Nowhere in the parable does a sibling appear, the one who would take the bride in levirate marriage in case of the bridegroom’s death<sup>62</sup>. And this wedding feast has a peculiar trait of being linked to judgment: those invited who did not want to come were punished and those taken to celebrate the feast in their stead ought to present themselves appropriately – the one who did not dress up for the occasion was thrown out in the darkness. The second feature of the one coming after John is that *he comes to purify with fire* (cf. Mal 3,19; also Am 7,4). In Matthew the coming of the Son of Man is presented in the view of judgment. He will appear in the horizon like the rising sun (cf. Mal 3,20). Moreover, the name of Zerah prepares the readers for the account of the star whose rising beacons the Magi to pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews. The Magi have seen the star from the east (*anatolē, mizrāh*, rising of the sun).

The names of Perez and Zerah, therefore, have proleptic function with respect to the infancy narrative and to the entire gospel. They point to the one who is coming, the Messiah. Both names show that God’s last word is not a word of condemnation, but word of blessing directed not only to Israel but also to the whole world. His coming, nevertheless, brings to light man’s freedom and so the reason for God’s judgment becomes clear.

### **4.3. Joseph, *the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus, called the Christ, was born***

Of all the twelve sons of Jacob, Judah has been picked out because it is from him that a king, whose scepter will never be taken away, will arise. The father and son segment of the third part of the genealogy, “Jacob fathered Joseph,” brings us back to another father and son segment in the first

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<sup>62</sup> This interpretation has come to me while reading the parallel Johannine passage, where it is clear that we are talking of Christ as bridegroom and that John in his humility would not even consider the possibility of taking the bride in levirate marriage and take the sandal as a sign sealing the act of taking over (as we read in Ruth 4,7).



part, “Jacob fathered Judah.” The parallelism cannot go unnoticed. In the first part, the mention of Judah with his brothers remind us of the time they had to appear before Joseph, whom they had sold to the Egyptians; in the third part, Joseph’s namesake, whose father’s name is also Jacob, prepares us for the narration which mentions Egypt, where the Holy family would take refuge and whence return to the Promised land. However, the parallel between the two father-son pairs in the genealogy does not focus on this movement to Egypt but on the sons’ relationship with their female partners; for, in fact, both are mentioned with the names of their respective partners: Judah with Tamar as the first of the five couples mentioned in the genealogy, Joseph and Mary as the last.

Matthew, then, must have set the sons of two Jacob’s on purpose – *for comparison*. Both Judah and Joseph learned of the unexpected pregnancy of the woman they are linked with, but the glaring difference between the two at the news is exploited by Matthew to enhance the figure of the one who became the legal father of the Messiah – Jesus will be known as the “son of the carpenter.”

Judah’s reaction at the news of his daughter-in-law’s pregnancy is put in contrast to Joseph’s reaction at the news of Mary’s pregnancy. Judah ordered that Tamar be brought forth to be burnt (cf. Gn 38,24). It was before a crowd of people leading her away that Tamar sent to Judah to take notice of the belongings of the one who impregnated her, and Judah had to admit that his daughter-in-law was more righteous than he (*šād<sup>63</sup> qāh mimmennî*, Gn 38,26).

On the other hand, Matthew described Joseph as “a righteous man and not willing to expose her in public disgrace” (Mt 1,19). His righteousness is expressed in the merciful step he had taken with regards to his apparently unfaithful spouse, who must be condemned to death (cf. Lev 20,10; Deut 22,22) by stoning, as in the case of a betrothed virgin (Deut 22,20-21)<sup>63</sup>. Having decided to let go of her silently, he kept on pondering over the matter, and it was then that an angel was sent to make him know the mystery of his spouse’s pregnancy.

Judah did not lie with Tamar again (Gn 38,26), and Joseph did not know his spouse until she gave birth to her Child (Mt 1,25).

Matthew’s concern is, first, to show the kind of person chosen to become the husband of Mary, the mother of the Messiah, comparing him to his ancestor Judah – Joseph is a righteous man, and, second, there is no intervention from Joseph’s part at the conception of the Child. Matthew’s concerns, however, do not include explaining what happened after the birth of the Child.

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<sup>63</sup> Harlotry is condemned as well. Cf. Deut 22,21.

#### 4.4. David, *the King* and Jesus, *called the Messiah*

Only two names in the genealogy bear titles: David *the king* and Jesus called *the Messiah*, the first at the end of the first part of the genealogy and the latter at the end of the genealogy.

In the Gospel there is only another person with the title "the king" attached to his name; only Herod *the king* in chapter 2. We have seen above that David is the culmination of the first part of the genealogy. He is the king promised to issue from the line of Judah. Yet the second part of the genealogy begins with a son begotten by "that of Uriah". We know that Solomon was born after the death of Uriah and the death of the child born of the adulterous union of David and Bathsheba. But Matthew's mention only of the name Uriah and not also of his wife's leads us to think that Matthew is pointedly making the title *the king* attached to both monarchs a means to underscore the innocent blood David shed on account of his lust as much as Herod's shedding innocent blood in Bethlehem on account of his fear to lose the crown. Both monarchs ordered the death of the innocent.

Matthew gives the title "king of Judah" and "king of Israel" only to Jesus, and that at the time of his trial before Pilate, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (27,11), and the soldiers mocked him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" (27,29), on the cross an inscription was written upon his head, "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews" (27,37), and the crowd invites the "king of Israel" to save himself as he saved others (27,42)<sup>64</sup>.

*Iēsous ho legomenos Iristos*, "Jesus called the Messiah", appears again only at the Passion narrative, when Pilate asks the crowd which of the two he should free for the feast, "Barabba or Jesus called Messiah?" (27,17), and when he asked what he would do to "Jesus called Messiah" (27,22).<sup>65</sup> The title "Messiah" then points to his passion and death, the way in which he will save – Jesus' name means "[God] will save" – his people from their sins (1,21).

The titles "the king" – although given to David in the genealogy – and "the Messiah", therefore, are already looking forward to the culmination of Jesus' life, his Passion and Death. But He will rise up from the dead and will remain with us forever.

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. MGM, 143-144.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. MGM, 1011-1018.

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