



# 1. *Ecclesia Reformata* in Matthew 1,1-17. A Biblical Paradigm

## *Ecclesia reformata* en Mateo 1,1-17. Un paradigma bíblico

Kim Papaioannou

### **Abstract**

The Adventist church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century faces numerous challenges in the fast changing societies it operates in. How best can it adapt? The genealogy of Matthew 1,1-17, though seemingly without much direct relevance, in reality provides a framework of how God works in changing historical contexts to guide His people towards the goal of salvation. Matthew 1,1-17 outlines three historical periods in the history of Israel where changing circumstances require adjusted models of operation and organizational structures. Yet throughout such changes, very painful at times, God's ultimate purposes are never derailed but continue to move towards the climax, the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ. The Adventist church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can likewise have the assurance that whatever the changing circumstances it faces, God's purpose will be fulfilled towards the anticipated climax, the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus.

### **Key words**

Israel history — Matthew 1 — Genealogy — Divine purpose — Abraham — David — Exile

### **Resumen**

En el siglo veintiuno, la Iglesia adventista enfrenta numerosos desafíos en las sociedades rápidamente cambiantes en las cuales opera. ¿Cómo puede adaptarse mejor? La genealogía de Mateo 1,1-17, aunque aparentemente sin mucha relevancia directa, realmente proporciona un marco de cómo Dios trabaja en cambiar los contextos históricos para guiar a su pueblo hacia el objetivo de la salvación. Mateo 1,1-17 bosqueja tres períodos históricos en la historia de Israel donde las circunstancias cambiantes exigieron la adaptación de modelos de operación y estructuras organizativas. No obstante a través de tales cambios, a veces muy dolorosos, los propósitos supremos de Dios nunca se frustraron, sino que

continuaron hacia su culminación, el nacimiento del salvador Jesucristo. Del mismo modo, la Iglesia adventista en el siglo veintiuno puede tener la seguridad de que cualesquiera sean las circunstancias cambiantes que enfrente, el propósito de Dios se cumplirá hacia el clímax anticipado, la segunda venida de Jesús.

### Palabras claves

Historia de Israel — Mateo 1 — Genealogía — Propósito divino — Abrahán — David — Exilio

## Introduction

*Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*, “the church reformed ever reforming”, is a motto of obscure origins,<sup>1</sup> popularised in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by individuals like Karl Barth,<sup>2</sup> that encapsulates the idea that the church should never become stale and static but should always be characterized by the vigour of its search for God’s ideal. As such the concept is thoroughly biblical. But Matthew 1,1-17, the genealogy of Jesus, might seem like an unlikely source for a reformation paradigm. And perhaps it is if we understand a reformation to be something akin to the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, fiery theologians leading a reform movement against ecclesiastical abuses of the time. Not that in the genealogy of Jesus there is an absence of fiery men of God. The list includes the names of great persons like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, and Zerubbabel, whose example still inspires believers. Their work shaped to a large extent the history of God’s people in Old Testament times. But few Christians today would consider these individuals as “reformers” in the sense of the later Christian reformers. Their times and work were different.

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Case-Winters, “Ecclesia Reformata Semper Reformanda: Reformed and Always to be Reformed”, in *Presbyterians Being Reformed: Reflections on What the Church Needs Today*, ed. Robert H. Bullock Jr (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2006), 29-30.

<sup>2</sup> Georg Plasger, “The Dynamics of the Reformed Reformation: German Reformed Church Orders in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century”, in *Calvinism and the Making of the European Mind*, eds. Gijsbert Van Den Brink and Harro M. Höpfl (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic, 2014), 67-68.

Neither is any type of “reform” work by these individuals outlined in Matthew 1,1-17.

Nonetheless, if we give the word “reformation” a broader understanding, then Matthew 1,1-17 might have important insights to offer. Etymologically, “reformation” means to re-form, or re-shape something.<sup>3</sup> In a spiritual sense, it describes the reshaping of the forms and shape of the people of God. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century this happened as a result of the work of the reformers and the reshaping involved a radical re-adjustment of church hierarchy, administration, liturgy, and theology.

In Matthew 1,1-17 three major stages are outlined in the history of Israel, the patriarchal, the age of the Davidic kingdom, and the time after the exile into Babylon: “So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations” (Matt 1,17).<sup>4</sup> Each transition involves a major reshaping of the organizational structures and shape of the people of God, a “re-formation” so to speak.<sup>5</sup> The way this reshaping takes place and is described might offer insights into the ongoing desire of the body of Christ to be a reforming body.

### The Patriarchal Age

Matthew begins the genealogy of Jesus with Abraham, the father of Israel (Matt 1,1-2), in contrast to Luke, who begins his with Adam, the father of all humankind (Luke 3,38). This difference reflects the different focus of the two authors. Matthew, writing most likely to Jews or Jewish Christians, begins the genealogy

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds. *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), s.v.

<sup>4</sup> All Bible references are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

<sup>5</sup> R. T. France, *The gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 29; calls Matthew’s genealogy “in effect a survey of the history of the people of God from its very beginning with Abraham, the ancestor of Israel, to the coming of the Messiah, the ‘son of David’”.

with the father of Israel.<sup>6</sup> Luke, writing most likely to a Gentile or Gentile Christian, Theophilus,<sup>7</sup> and being himself of Gentile background,<sup>8</sup> takes a more universal outlook and traces the genealogy of Jesus all the way back to Adam and God.<sup>9</sup>

Abraham belongs to the patriarchal age. The main unit of organization is the extended family, the household. Abraham (initially Abram) leaves Ur of the Chaldeans together with his wife Sarai (later Sarah), Terah his father, and Lot his nephew, and their respective families and travels to Haran. After Terah dies, God instructs Abraham to move on to Canaan which seems to have been the original destination before the stop at Haran (Gen 11,31).

Abraham's household numbers probably over a thousand persons. When he pitches his tent between Bethel and Ai, his and Lot's livestock is so large that the respective herdsmen end up quarrelling over the use of pasture land. When they decide to part ways and Lot is later captured in a raid by four Mesopotamian kings, Abraham arms 318 of his servants (Gen 14,14) and in a lightning raid defeats the kings, rescues Lot and the other prisoners, and captures abundant booty, which he nonetheless returns to its original owners (Gen 14,22-24). Given that only adult males were

<sup>6</sup> See Robert Horton Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 13; John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1-7* (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1985), xi-xiii, 2.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 1992), 26-27; Darrell Bock, "Luke, Gospel of" *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. J. B. Green and S. McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1992), 498; But see also Loveday Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 187-199; Willis C. Newman, *Luke, John, and Acts: Background, Outline and Commentary* (Tacoma, WA: Newman International LLC, 2006) 33-36.

<sup>8</sup> See Col 4,14 where Paul lists Luke separately from Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus, who are "of the circumcision" (Col 4,11); But see James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 9-10 who argues that Paul's lists of names elsewhere show no interest in ethnicity. The point is valid in general but mute here since Paul's listing in Col 4,10-14 does seem to group individuals based on their religious background, Jewish or Gentile.

<sup>9</sup> MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, 3 notes that Luke's genealogy probably traces Jesus' physical ancestry through Mary, and Matthew's royal lineage through Joseph.

expected to go into battle, it seems that Abraham's servants including women, children and elderly must have numbered about four times the number of armed men, an indication of his wealth and power.<sup>10</sup> Isaac likewise had a large enough entourage that the Philistines began to fear him (Gen 26,14).

The patriarchal faith experience was centered on altars dedicated to God. Abraham built altars at Shechem (Gen 12,6-7), east of Bethel (Gen 12,8), in Hebron (Gen 13,18), on Mount Moriah (Gen 22,9). At times he revisited altars he had built earlier (Gen 13,4). Isaac built an altar in Beer-Sheba (Gen 26,25). Jacob built altars in Shechem, and in Bethel (Gen 35,1.7).

The patriarchal faith had an evangelistic dimension. Of Abraham it is said: "For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him" (Gen 18,19). It is unclear if the "household" here refers primarily to Abraham's physical descendants, or to all persons living under his protection. The expressions "his children" and "after him" implies a diachronic application so Abraham's descendants are in view. However, it is not limited to them. The word *tyIB*;, "household", can refer not only to the immediate family but to anyone, including servants, associated with the head of the family.<sup>11</sup> For example, to God's promise of future greatness Abraham objects noting "behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir" (Gen 15,3). The member of the "household" here is Abraham's trusted servant Eliezer of Damascus (Gen 15,2).<sup>12</sup> It is evident therefore that the

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 11,27-50,26: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2005), 147.

<sup>11</sup> R. Laird Harris, ed. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol 1 (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980).

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of Eliezer and the tradition of adopted servants inheriting their master see Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1973), 183-184, who points to examples from the Nuzi tablets.

“household” which Abraham would command to keep the way of the Lord included not only blood relatives and descendants, but everyone associated with his home.<sup>13</sup>

There is evidence that Abraham indeed instructed his extended household. The eldest servant in his household whom Abraham entrusted with finding a wife for Isaac was clearly a believer since he took an oath “by the Lord” (Gen 24,3), prayed to God (Gen 24,12), and throughout this incident exemplified the behavior of a devout follower of God.<sup>14</sup> There is a question as to whether this senior servant is to be identified with the somewhat obscure figure of Eliezer of Damascus<sup>15</sup> who was in line to inherit Abraham before the birth of Isaac and Ishmael. The fact that the servant entrusted with finding a wife for Isaac is called the “oldest” and Eliezer appears as the most important, could suggest that the two are one and the same individual.<sup>16</sup> But even if different, it is unlikely that Abraham would have left his fortune to a heathen servant and not to a blood relative like Lot. Eliezer must therefore be seen also as a believer.

What about other servants? The Bible does not spell out their attitude towards God. That fact that Abraham was able to arm 318 of his servants without fear of a servant rebellion indicates that his relation with his servants went far beyond the relationship of master to servant. A common faith would be a solid bond to tie these men to Abraham to the point of risking their lives for him and foregoing the opportunity for freedom and easy profit from the spoils of war. It seems therefore that Abraham was both busy and

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<sup>13</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 18. Describes the scope of the blessing envisaged as, “an enormous nation and the means of blessing to the world”.

<sup>14</sup> See Matthews, *Genesis 11,27-50,26*, 330-331.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 164-165.

<sup>16</sup> See Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash: The Story of “The Wooing of Rebekah” (Gen. 24)* (Leuven, Netherlands: Peeters, 2004), 177-178. For a discussion of the identification of the servant of Gen 24 with Eliezer in the Genesis Rabbah.

effective in sharing his faith with the persons around him and that his household was a large and increasing community of faith.

After the captivity in Egypt and the Exodus Israel ceased to be an extended household and became a fairly large nation.<sup>17</sup> But the tribe and family remained key administrative components. Moses held the leadership role for the whole nation. But fairly quickly he realized that he could not govern on his own, and on the advice of Jethro appointed rulers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens (Exod 18,14-27). Israel camped in the wilderness according to her tribal divisions (Num 2,1-34), and offerings to God at the inauguration of the sanctuary were offered by heads of tribes and families (Num 7,1-3). The census was taken to the “clans, by their fathers’ houses” (Num 1,20). And it was likewise by tribe and family that the land of Canaan was divided among them (Josh 14,1-17,18).

Once in Canaan, and during the time of the judges, Israel was organized on a tribal basis. Judges ruled over different tribes in different parts of the country often with limited interaction between them (Judg 5,23). When a Levite’s concubine is grossly abused and killed in Gibeah, a town of Benjamin, he voices his complain not to a centralized authority, but to each of the tribes separately (Judg 19,29-30). This is perhaps the only instance when the whole nation, putting aside tribal differences comes together “as one man” (Judg 20,1)<sup>18</sup> to resolve the problem leading eventually to the near extinction of the tribe of Benjamin. The time of

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<sup>17</sup> On the numbers of the nation of Israel at the Exodus see R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, The New American Commentary, vol. 3 (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 78-82. According to Num 1,46 and 26,51 the men of war numbered 603,560 at the beginning of the sojourn in the wilderness, and 601,730 near the end. These would require a total population of more than 2 million and perhaps 3 or more. Cole discusses a number of possible solutions that are beyond the scope of this study to critically examine. It seems however, that the very numbering of the people is an indication that God has blessed Israel and she had become a populous nation.

<sup>18</sup> See Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 472-474. Webb observes that “ironically, this is a greater response than any of the judges had achieved, as far as we know” (473).

the judges was a time of no centralized authority or rule of law, and every sub-unit of Israel managed its own affairs.

### The Age of the Davidic Kingdom

The first major re-formation or organizational readjustment comes with the establishment of the kingdom which brings with it a centralization of authority: “So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations” (Matt 1,17). According to the biblical record, the first king of Israel was Saul and his appointment was in response to the clamors of Israel to have a king “like all the nations” (1 Sam 8,5). This request not only displeased Samuel who was judge at the time, but was understood as a rejection of the leadership of God (1 Sam 8,7).<sup>19</sup> Matthew somehow overlooks the kingship of Saul and places the transition from one era to the next with the kingship of David (Matt 1,17).

Matthew was clearly not ignorant of the history of Israel. There are a number of reasons why he marks the dividing line with David. First, Matthew is interested in the genealogy of Jesus, and Saul was not one of Jesus’ ancestors. David was the first royal ancestor. So it is natural to mention David but not Saul. But perhaps there is more to it.

In Deuteronomy 17,14-20 there was already provision for the transformation of Israel from a patriarchal/tribal society to a nation with a king, and rules were set as to what a king should and should not do.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the author of the book of Judges saw the absence of a king as a reason for much of the evils that befell

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<sup>19</sup> David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 251-252.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the Deuteronomic kingship pericope and whether it is anticipated positively or as a concession, see Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 538-543.

Israel during the time of the judges (Judg 17,6; 18,1; 19,1; 21,25).<sup>21</sup> The fact that many messianic prophecies use royal language and that king David was understood as a model of the coming Messiah,<sup>22</sup> probably indicates that a king would have been appointed over Israel sooner or later. Perhaps the problem with the kingship of Saul was not that Israel was going to have a king, but the fact that the request for a king was fuelled by a desire to be like the other nations, as well as by the fact that Saul proved an unworthy candidate. The fact that Matthew numbers the generations from Abraham to David, and then from David to the Exile perhaps indicates that David was the first true king of Israel in the eyes of God.

The transition from a patriarchal/tribal form of organization entailed a number of important changes both sociologically and spiritually. Beginning with Saul, Israel now has a standing, professional army. The catalyst is Saul's first battle as king against the Ammonites (1 Sam 11,10). After the defeat of the Ammonites, Saul's detractors are silenced (1 Sam 11,12-13), Samuel renews the kingship of Saul (1 Sam 11,14-15), and 3,000 of the men who took part in the battle are chosen to remain as a standing army, 2,000 at Michmash under the direct command of Saul, and 1,000 in Gibeon under the leadership of Jonathan, Saul's son (1 Sam 13,2).

The small standing army of Saul becomes a powerful war machine under David and Solomon. David has a large personal bodyguard of Philistine mercenaries (Cherethites and Pelethites) (2 Sam 8,18),<sup>23</sup> garrisons in cities he has captured (e.g. 2 Sam

<sup>21</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 427-427, calls the phrase "the Refrain" because of its recurrence. Webb lists four main reasons for the occurrence of this refrain. The first three relate to internal coherence and unity, but the fourth reason he lists is that "it hints at the next major development to take place in Israel's development as a nation – the emergence of kingship – and in effect offers an apology for it".

<sup>22</sup> Cf. for example the royal psalms (e.g. Psalms 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 101; 110; 132; 144) often understood to refer to the Messiah.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion on the identity of the Cherethites and Pelethites, their origin and connection to the Philistines, see Carl S. Ehrlich, *The Philistines in Transition: A History from Ca. 1000-730*

8,6,14), and a standing army overseen by family members (2 Sam 8,16), as well as a civil administration (2 Sam 8,16). Solomon expands the centralized government substantially, building garrison towns with horse stables (1 Kgs 4,26; 2 Chr 9,25). He has 12,000 horsemen (1 Kgs 4,26). He divides his empire into twelve districts, each with its own administrator and specific responsibilities (1 Kgs 4:7-19). Under David, Israel acquires a capital city, Jerusalem, which remains until its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.

More important for our purposes is the centralization of Israel's spiritual life. Until the kingdom of David, Israel's faith was centered on the mobile sanctuary which moved from place to place, as the need required. The sanctuary, though beautifully adorned, was a simple structure, an elaborate tent, befitting perhaps the concept of a God who wants to dwell close and similarly to His people who also lived in tents at the time when the sanctuary was built. Simplicity, proximity, intimacy were perhaps some of the concepts exemplified by it.

With the establishment of a strong kingdom, David feels that a sanctuary for the God of Israel should be established befitting the new status of the nation, as a local superpower (2 Sam 7,2). It is not at all clear if David's thoughts reflected the divine outlook. When David tells the prophet Nathan his plans, the prophet eagerly agrees (2 Sam 7,3). But in a vision of the night God has other thoughts. He promises to build a house for David, a promise understood to refer to the Messiah that was to come,<sup>24</sup> instead of

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*B.C.E.* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1996), 37-41. Ehlich expresses an uncertainty about the exact identity of the Cherethites and more so of the Pelethites, perhaps given the lack of abundant historical information, but admits that on the basis of the Scriptural record, "it would appear that an ethnic relationship between the two [Philistines and Cherethites] was assumed in at least part of the ancient world" (39).

<sup>24</sup> MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, 2-3. Genealogies were important to Jews for a number of reasons, including Davidic ancestry for the Messiah. So to begin the gospel of Jesus the Messiah with a genealogy is not unusual. Mac Arthur makes that interesting observation that since the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70, there are no longer genealogical records. Jews living subsequently to that date would not be able to trace their lineage. Any

David building a “house,” a temple for God. But God does accede to David’s desire but on the caveat that it will be David’s son Solomon who will build the temple, rather than David himself, since David has shed a lot of blood.

The temple that is eventually built by Solomon is a glorious building and becomes the central focus of Israel’s faith. When the nation splits into two parts with Jerusalem and the temple within the realm of the kingdom of Judah, Jeroboam is so worried by the appeal the Jerusalem temple might have on his own subjects, that he constructs two rival temples, one close to the border of Judah in Bethel and the other on the very north of the country, right in the opposite end (1 Kgs 12,26-30). The strategy is fairly clear. For those who will think to travel south to the Jerusalem temple for the annual feasts, Jeroboam hopes that the temple in the south will serve as a good alternative, and the pilgrims will stop there rather than continue the arduous journey further south. Conversely, the temple in the north aims to direct people’s minds away from the Jerusalem temple in the south and provide an alternative cultic focus. Israel’s religion is therefore temple focused, with Jerusalem for the kingdom of Judah, and Dan and Bethel for the kingdom of Israel.

The importance of the temple is evidenced in the attitudes of the leaders of Jerusalem shortly before the destruction of the city by Nebuchadnezzar. When Jeremiah warns of impending doom, the leaders of Jerusalem think that since the temple of God remains in their midst, they have nothing to fear (Jer 7,4). Indeed the very suggestion that Jerusalem and the temple could be destroyed was considered high treason.

Concurrent with the establishment of the temple, though perhaps unrelated to it, is the growth of the prophetic ministry. Prophets, to be sure, were known before. Abraham is called a “prophet” (Gen 20,7); so is Mo-

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Davidic ancestry claims therefore by any subsequent prospective Messiah would hung in the balance.

ses (Deut 18,15; 34,10), and Aaron (Exod 7,1); and there are extended discussions of the prophetic ministry in Deuteronomy 13,1-11 and 18,15-22.<sup>25</sup> But with the exception of Samuel, few other prophets are mentioned. The picture changes with the establishment of the monarchy. Now every king has a prophet or groups of prophets around him that serve as advisors.

The initial personal evangelistic ministry and witness to God of the patriarchs is now replaced by more formal relations with the pagan peoples surrounding Israel, as would befit a powerful nation with a powerful king. David has diplomatic interactions with the Ammonites which, nonetheless, turn sour and lead to war (2 Sam 10,1-14); as well as with Hiram, king of Tyre, who provides David with material to build a palace (2 Sam 5,9-10). Solomon continues and expands this friendship; he receives material to build the temple and his palace and in turns gives the king of Tyre 20 cities in Galilee (1 Kgs 5,1-18; 9,11-14). Solomon also makes a treaty with Pharaoh and marries his daughter (1 Kgs 3,1). He eventually takes 700 wives and 300 concubines, no doubt many of them as a result of treaties (1 Kgs 11,3). But instead of Solomon being a witness to them, they turn his heart away from God (1 Kgs 11,3).

More famous and benevolent are his interactions with the Queen of Sheba who comes from afar to hear Solomon's wisdom. After their prolonged discussion (1 Kgs 10,3 and having seen the temple and Solomon's palace (1 Kgs 10,4), and their manner of

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<sup>25</sup> See Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 555-557. There is some debate whether Deut 18,15-22 anticipates an ongoing prophetic office or prophets arising as the need requires on command from the Lord. The contrast of the prophetic ministry with the false divinations and omens of necromancers, mediums, and wizards could suggest that just as these abominable forms were ongoing (Deut 18,10-14), likewise the true voice of God would shine through the prophetic gift on an ongoing basis. Conversely, there is no succession of prophets mentioned at this stage. Godly leadership could be exercised through other appointed individuals, like Joshua or the judges later, and moreover, from Moses' time onwards the prophetic voice could be heard through the writings of prophets.

operations, she declares, “blessed by the Lord your God” (1 Kgs 10,9), an admission of the sovereign deity of the God of Israel.

Beyond high polity, Israel’s ministry to the surrounding peoples also takes place at a more personal through the ministry of prophets. Elisha’s interactions with Naaman and his healing from leprosy (2 Kgs 5,1-19) do not have direct parallels in the rest of the accounts of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, but should not be seen as unique. Jonah ministers to Ninevah reluctantly, but with great success. Indeed, the writings of several of the prophets of the monarchy are at least partly addressed to the nations.<sup>26</sup> When Samaria, capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, falls to the Assyrians, and its inhabitants are carried away into captivity and replaced by heathens, those heathens are eventually brought within the sphere of monotheism and fringe Judaism.<sup>27</sup>

### From Exile to Jesus

The third stage in Israel’s history as recounted in Matthew 1,1-17 is “from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ” (Matt 1,17). Unlike the transition from the patriarchal/tribal age to the monarchy, the transition now is neither peaceful nor the result of popular demand. The Babylonians capture Jerusalem in 597 BC and eventually destroy it and the temple in 586 B.C.,<sup>28</sup> take the king and a large part of the population captive to Babylon, and leave Judah devastated, poor, and depopulated. This destruction of Jerusalem was probably Israel’s greatest catastrophe until its destruction at the hands of the Romans in AD 70.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. for example, Joel 3,1-16; Amos 1,3-2,5; Obad 1,8-21; Jonah 1,1-4,10; Nahum 1,1-3,19; Zephaniah 2,4-15; as well as the ministries of prophets like Elijah and Elisha.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the different views on the origins of the Samaritans see Reinhard Pummer, *The Samaritans* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1987), 2-3; Alan David Crown, *The Samaritans* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr, 1989), 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC when king was Zedekiah. But Zedekiah was not a direct ancestor of Jesus (2 Kings 24,17) and therefore his nephew Jehoniah/Jehoiachin is mentioned as the king who went into exile, as indeed happened in 597 BC (2 Kings 24,15-17), nine years before the final destruction of the city.

The destruction is not permanent. In 539 BC Cyrus king of Persia captures Babylon and gives permission to exiled Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple. The new building is smaller and much more humble than Solomon's (Ezra 3,12), though with a promise it would be more glorious (Hag 2,1-9), because "the desire of all nations" (Hag 2,7 KJV) would come. Subsequent enlargements and beautifications, especially by Herod, make it eventually an impressive building.

In 457 BC, Artaxerxes of Persia gives the command for Jerusalem to be rebuilt. In the years of relative peace and prosperity of the Persian and early Hellenistic eras (5<sup>th</sup> to early 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC) and the corresponding rise of its population, the city becomes again an important civic centre. But mishaps abound. In 168 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes takes control of Jerusalem and desecrates the temple, leading to a brief spell of persecution against the Jewish faith. Pompey likewise captures the city in 63 BC, but though he enters the Most Holy place in the temple, he refrains from any further suppression of Israel's faith.

Throughout this period Israel is subservient, first to Babylon (605-539 BC), then to Persia (539-331 BC), then to Alexander the Great and then the Greek rulers of Antioch or Egypt (331-148 BC), and eventually to Rome (70 BC onwards), with a brief spell of marginal independence in between (148-63 BC). For the most part, ruling powers are content to allow Jews to practise their faith in freedom.

Israel is no longer the only centre of Jewish life. Of the thousands deported to Babylon, many choose to remain behind and form the nucleus of a vibrant Jewish community. It is not the only one outside the borders of the land of Israel. Overpopulation, poverty, and the ease of travel that went hand-in-hand with the creation of large, unified empires, means that many Jews settle abroad in search of a better future. In addition to Babylon, Egypt, then Cyrene also receive large numbers of immigrants. Towards the north and west they settle in Damascus, Antioch, Cyprus, Asia Mi-

nor, Greece, Rome, and even beyond. A Jewish diaspora develops with some of the communities formed still extant today.

The temple remains the central focus of Israel's spiritual life. This explains why king Herod, an Idumean convert of convenience to Judaism, but still pagan at heart, spends lavish amounts to enlarge and beautify it. He wants to be popular. The temple is the focus of pilgrimages for Jewish believers from all over the diaspora. Acts 2,9-11 names 15 different countries and regions from which pilgrims have arrived in Jerusalem.

While the temple remains a centralised focus and a place of pilgrimage, spiritual life revolves more around the local synagogue. The history of the synagogue is shrouded in mystery. It is often traced to the Babylonian exile but this view is by no means certain or at anywhere near a consensus.<sup>29</sup> Its roots certainly date to a much earlier time. A Sabbath convocation was a part of the life of Israel at least since Leviticus 23,3 and given that Jerusalem was distant for weekly travel even for those living but a short distance away from it, it is almost certain that some form of local places of worship must have existed from a very early time. Indeed, the word *συναγωγή* appears in the LXX as early as Genesis, albeit in different contexts, highlighting perhaps the Jewish belief of the ancient origin of at least the concept, even if not of the specific form.

Missionary activity is no longer the domain of prophets or kings. Every synagogue becomes a centre of faith much like local churches today. By the time of the Hellenistic and Roman eras,

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<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of possible origins see Dan Urman and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher, "A Reader's Guide," in *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archeological Discovery*, eds. Dan Urman and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1994) 20-25. The predominant view until fairly recently was that synagogues originated about the time of the Babylonian exile. The first modern proponent of this view was 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian humanist Carolus Sigonius, though Urman and Flesher, *Ancient Synagogues*, 21 suggest an earlier rabbinic origin of the theory, though they cite no supportive evidence. From the 1970's this theory was challenged with alternative geographical origins given as Egypt or Palestine. It should be noted that the dominant view in ancient Judaism as well as the NT was that the synagogue originates with Moses (e.g. LXX Exod 12,47; Lev 4,13; Deut 33,4; Acts 15,21; Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:17, Philo, *Vita Moses*, II, 38).

they begin to attract considerable numbers of converts. These can be either full converts, *προσήλυτοι*, or individuals who perhaps do not want to experience a painful circumcision required for full conversion, or the derision of fellow pagans, and remain attendees, God fearers. Proselytes are mentioned four times in the New Testament,<sup>30</sup> but God fearers twelve times,<sup>31</sup> indicating both the impact of the Jewish faith on surrounding pagans through the synagogue, and perhaps the balance of numbers of God fearers versus full proselytes.

Spiritual leadership once held by the king, the priesthood, and prophets, not always in unison, now spreads to a broader basis. Apart from the short period of Jewish independence under the Maccabbes, there no longer is an independent king. There might be governors like Zerubabel, or there might be client kings, like those of the dynasty of Herod, but ultimate political authority rests with pagans. So the king/governor as the trendsetter in spiritual matters, as was the case in the monarchy, fades in the background.

After a flare of the gift of prophecy during the early years of the return of the exiles, with individuals like Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the gift of prophecy ceases at least in a canonical way.<sup>32</sup>

The priesthood in the temple continues to play a dominant role. But after the compromises of the Hellenistic period with the

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<sup>30</sup> Matthew 23,15; Acts 2,11, 6,5, 13,43.

<sup>31</sup> They are called *φοβούμενοι* and derivatives 7 times (Acts 10,2, 22,35; 13,16,26; Rev 11,18; 19,5; and *σεβόμενοις* and derivatives 5 times (Acts 13,50; 16,44; 17,4,17; 18,7).

<sup>32</sup> On the question of the cessation of prophecy see L. Stephen Cook, *On the Question of the "Cessation of Prophecy" in Ancient Judaism*, Text and Studies in Ancient Judaism 145 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) Cook discusses the various approaches from the traditional approach that prophecy ceased with Malachi in the Persian period, to the view that some of the canonical prophets are antedate Malachi and the Persian period (the so called third Isaiah, Daniel, and perhaps Jonah), to the view that prophecy continued even if it did not take canonical form. It seems, however, that even within 2<sup>nd</sup> temple Jewish sources, the view that prophecy had indeed ceased predominated.

High Priesthood being sold to the highest bidder, and then the usurpation of the office by persons who are not from a priestly line, as well as the wealth and worldliness often associated with the holders of the office, confidence in that ancient institution disintegrates. Priests still wield some religious and even civil authority, but groups of dissenters like the Essenes spring up. The corruption of the priesthood is a recurring theme in extra biblical Jewish writings of the era.

Perhaps the single most important spiritual development of this epoch are the reforms of Ezra. Ezra, a priest and scribe who returns to Israel from Babylon with the express goal of reforming the faith of Israel, begins a work rebuilding the nation on a more sound basis. He brings Levites to function as teachers of Scripture, arranges for the development of a Scriptural canon, makes arrangements for copies of the Scriptures to be made, and organizes public readings. Scriptural knowledge is therefore disseminated on a wider scale than ever before, with a corresponding spread of spiritual leadership. The result is a spiritual revival similar to or exceeding in scope that of Josiah.

Ezra's work of disseminating Scripture and the later struggles against the Hellenists eventually lead to the development of the Pharisees who become the major force in spiritual matters in Israel and the absolutely dominant one after the destruction of the second temple and the priesthood in AD 70. The Jewish faith of the Middle Ages and beyond was shaped to a large extent by the traditions and sayings of Pharisaic rabbis as recorded in the Mishnah and Talmud as well as other rabbinic collections. Much maligned in the gospels because of their attachment to form over substance as well as their opposition to Jesus, they nonetheless provided a stabilising influence during their earlier history.

Pharisees provided much of the leadership in local synagogues, which were, as noted above, a key component in the life of Israel. But they were not the only ones. Any man of respect in a local community could lead out in synagogue services which consisted

mainly of a public reading of Scripture, short expositions, hymns, and prayer.

### Observations on “Reformation” in Matthew 1,1-17

A number of observations can be drawn from the history of Israel discussed above as divided by Matthew in three distinct periods. On the human side, it is evident that Israel’s history exemplifies the simple rule of cause and effect. Israel’s history is awash with spiritual triumphs and equally so with spiritual disasters. Behind each stand righteous or corrupt individuals, or righteous individuals who made wrong choices.

But beyond the human element, there is a higher vantage point from which to understand the events. Four conclusions lend themselves to us from Matthew’s genealogy. The first is that there appears to be an overriding sense of divine sovereign authority that supersedes the human element. Matthew explains that “all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations” (Matt 1,17). The fact that all three periods outlined by Matthew are presented as lasting fourteen generations suggests some kind of divine plan.<sup>33</sup> This divine plan has already been assumed in the opening phrase “the book of the ge-

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<sup>33</sup> Matthew’s list appears to draw from 1 Chronicles 1-3 but with the names appearing in reverse order (see Gundry, *Matthew*, 14-20 for a detailed discussion. Gundry observes that Matthew omits a number of names to arrive at the number 14; France, *The gospel of Matthew*, 29, writes that “the fact that it is only with difficulty that the actual history can be made to fit into this pattern indicates that for the author this is not so much a statistical observation as a theological reflection on the working out of God’s purpose for his people.” A comparison also with Luke’s genealogy would also indicate an intentional grouping by Matthew into lists of 14; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 75, notes that omitting names in a genealogy was “common enough” in ancient genealogies.

nealogy,” which indicates both a sense of fulfillment and a sense of a new creation.<sup>34</sup>

The number fourteen is double the number seven<sup>35</sup> which in turn is a symbol of God’s perfection. Imperfect, indeed horrible, though human history might be, there is a Sovereign who is above it and in control of it. This control is not arbitrary and does not reflect a divine predestination. As Israel’s history unfolds, human actions have consequences both for good and for evil. The reforms of Josiah bring a great revival, while the obstinacy and complacency of Israel’s leadership a generation later lead to the utter destruction and desolation of Jerusalem for 70 years. God does not limit human freedom, neither does He manipulate it. But in His all knowledgeable and almighty oversight of human affairs, He knows how to call the right people at the right time, and through such exercise His plan for the salvation of humanity. Perhaps then, the triple reference to fourteen generations is an assurance that despite human failings, God is still in control of history.

A second lesson, congruent to the first, is that God not only has the ultimate control of history, but directs history towards a specific goal. Matthew opens his gospel with the words: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1,1). This opening line not only informs the reader of the ancestors of Jesus, but seems to imply a sense of movement

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<sup>34</sup> France, *The gospel of Matthew*, 29. For France the opening phrase to the Jewish mind would be comparable to John’s opening phrase, “in the beginning,” signaling both the beginning of a new creation and the fulfillment of Scripture regarding it; MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, 9 calls the genealogy of Jesus, “a beautiful testimony to God’s grace.”

<sup>35</sup> France, *The gospel of Matthew*, 31-32, sees the primary function of 14 as being the double of 7. He feels that Matthew draws from the days of creation and from the division of history into seven periods in some sources and cites Gen 41,3-7, 26-30; Dan 9,24-27. Three 14s equals six 7s in which case the coming of Christ would signal the seventh glorious period of human history. This is however, fairly speculative, and the two passages cited do not quite divide world history into seven periods. France himself admits that “if this is what Matthew meant, he has not said it explicitly” (32). We keep therefore 14 as a double of 7, but put aside France’s remaining speculative approach.

from Abraham, to David, to Jesus who is the Christ.<sup>36</sup> There is a sense of purpose and direction. The number fourteen is not only the double of seven, but was also a number reflecting deliverance<sup>37</sup> – on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan Israel celebrated her exodus from Egypt, the single most important commemoration in Israel's history.<sup>38</sup> The connection of the person of Jesus and deliverance is stated almost immediately in Matthew's gospel: "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1,21). This end goal of deliverance probably seemed very distant during some of the darker hours of Israel's history – during the centuries of slavery in Egypt; during the decades of rule of wicked kings like Ahab or Manasseh; during the long trip to exile in Babylon with the images of a smoldering temple fresh in the minds of the exiles. And yet, these darkest moments cannot overrule or derail the certain movement of history towards God's mighty act of deliverance. The darker the darkness may appear, the brighter God's deliverance will shine at the appropriate moment.

A third, and more practical, and perhaps harder reality for us to grasp and accept, is that in this divinely sovereign historical movement towards redemption, forms and structures are of secondary importance. Times of transition are painful. There is a sense of loss

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<sup>36</sup> Gundry, *Matthew*, 13 notes this movement and writes: "Matthew's 'a record of the origin'... reflects OT phraseology, such as that in Gen 2,4; 5,1 LXX... In Genesis the first entry gives a genealogy its name. But Matthew names its first and final entry, Jesus Christ. This reversal and the borrowing of the OT phrase make the genealogy portray Jesus as the goal and fulfillment of the OT".

<sup>37</sup> For other possible, but unlikely meanings of the number 14, see Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 74.

<sup>38</sup> A number of scholars (e.g. Gundry, *Matthew*, 18-19; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 74), place importance on the fact that the letters of the name David also equal 14. David is the 14<sup>th</sup> name on the list of names and, as noted already, the genealogy of Jesus is divided into three lists of 14 names each. As such, some see a connection between David, the number 14, and Jesus. In that sense, Jesus is the promised Davidic King who will free Israel and establish her in security and power, though, of course the deliverance and power envisaged are not temporal and violent, but rather those of the kingdom of God. Such an approach may sound attractive. However, the fact that Matthew is writing in Greek to Greek speakers means that the numerical value of David's name would be lost on the readers. More importantly, there is little evidence of such a hermeneutical tool utilized by Bible writers.

when Israel's privileged position in Egypt turns to prejudice and then to slavery when a king "who did not know Joseph" (Exod 1,8) begins to reign. There is a deep sense of pain when Samuel's leadership is challenged and Israel asks for a king. The exile is perhaps the most difficult of Israel's challenges in the period outlined, a song of lament, Lamentations, being written by Jeremiah specifically for it. And yet, back from the exile Israel returns more vibrant and without some of the sins that plagued her during her earlier years.

Forms and structures, buildings and organizational arrangements, appear important and are indeed important. They serve a purpose while they are there, some in better ways and others not that well. It is the responsibility of insightful leaders to develop, sharpen, utilize these for the benefits of God's people. But in the bigger scheme of things they are transient. When all has been said and done, they are useful only so long as they serve their intended purpose.

Fourth, people are what counts. It is perhaps important that in his presentation of the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew does mention the position of David, king, or an event of major proportions in relation to the structures and forms of Israel, the exile, but apart from these he only focuses on individuals, on people. This might seem natural since, after all, he is giving a genealogy, and genealogies are all about persons. However, the fact that Matthew has chosen to structure the genealogy of Jesus around three pivotal events and transition points in the history, means that he has the broader framework in mind. And yet in this broader framework, it is persons more than events or organizational structures that mark the movement of God's purpose through the centuries towards its climax, the deliverance embedded in the person of Jesus Christ. Structures and events come, but God's people continue in history.

## Epilogue

The Adventist church is standing on the climax of history. On the one hand, the expectation of an imminent 2<sup>nd</sup> coming means that any thought of re-formation appears redundant. Time is too short to need one. On the other, the challenges of a rapidly changing world require that the church adapts to meet the challenges it faces. How should we respond?

Change is difficult and painful; non-change can be equally so. Finding the right balance between change and continuity often seems impossible. But human failures cannot derail the plan of God. His will triumph and His redemption will soon be manifested, in the second appearing of Jesus the Christ. God's people, while serving as wise stewards, have nothing to fear of the future.

Kim Papaioannou  
Area Leader for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Cyprus,  
and Adjunct Professor of New Testament  
[kpapaioannou@adventist.org.cy](mailto:kpapaioannou@adventist.org.cy)