

The Promise of His Protection

Many years ago, as I was going through a difficult time in my life, one morning I looked out the window of my second-floor condo. There was a thick fog outside, such as I had never seen before. I could make out only the treetops, nothing else. I thought to myself, *This matches the landscape of my heart. This looks like my life. I can't see anything. How am I going to get through this time?* At that moment I felt God speaking to me in my heart. The message was something like this: "I'll get you through it. Just don't let go of my hand."

Wow! I didn't need to see clearly. God would guide me through this difficult time. I was in His grip. A great peace came over me, and at that very moment, I drew a little picture in my devotional book. I still have it. I drew myself as a little girl with my hand in Jesus' hand; dense fog was all around us and only the treetops could be seen above it. That was it! That's the way my life was. But it was enough for me. Somehow, God's message of protection and guidance had reached the core of my being. Matthew starts his Gospel with a similar message.

This Gospel is very special; Matthew really wants us to understand that all the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms were about Jesus Christ. Matthew quotes the Jewish Scriptures at least forty-seven times, and several of those times he introduces the quotation by explaining that the event fulfilled what the prophet had foretold (see Matthew 1:22; 2:15). What a great view of Scripture! It's all about Jesus! God had a plan all along; Jesus would be the Savior of the world. And now, the mystery of redemption was being revealed.

The Son of David

In the first verse of Matthew, we find a summary of the passages that follows: “the record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David.” It is interesting to notice that Matthew starts his book by referring to Jesus as the son of David. David was the great king of Israel, but as a young boy, he had been a shepherd. You can read about his early life in 1 Samuel, starting with chapter 16. When David became king, God promised him that he would have an everlasting kingdom through his descendants (2 Samuel 7:8–16). His life story is found in 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Chronicles, the Psalms, and other places in the Bible.

After hundreds of years had gone by, God gave a prophecy. This prophecy is found in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 34. By this time, Israel as a nation had gone through very difficult times; King David was by then a sweet and distant memory. And this is what the Lord said in Ezekiel 34:2, “ ‘Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, “Thus says the LORD GOD, ‘Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?’ ” ’ ”

God said that those who had been appointed leaders of the people of Israel had not been taking care of them, and that He would come personally to do the job of the shepherd. “Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his heard in the day when he is among the scattered sheep, so will I care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day’ ” (Ezekiel 34:11, 12). “A cloudy and gloomy day”—much like my dense fog.

This is great news! God takes care of the feeble and broken. He even looks out for them when they have oppressive leaders!

The true Davidic Shepherd King

How was God going to take care of them? Well, this is where it

MATTHEW

gets really good! He would do it through a servant who would come in the likeness of David. So, if we go to Ezekiel 34:23, 24, this is what we find: “Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the LORD have spoken.” The way God was going to shepherd His people was through a descendant of David. Matthew is announcing that Jesus is that Davidic Shepherd King who has come to feed, guide, and protect God’s people.

This is the reason why Matthew must establish Jesus’ Davidic ancestry from the onset. He wants everyone who reads his book to understand that Jesus is the Anointed One, the Messiah, the descendant of David. Matthew feels so strongly about this emphasis that he divides all the genealogy of Jesus in three groups of fourteen generations. He clearly spells it out: “So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations” (Matthew 1:17).

Many scholars suggest that Matthew pays so much attention to the number fourteen because the numeric value of the Hebrew consonants in the name *David* add up to fourteen. The main reason for Matthew to focus on Jesus as the son of David is to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies regarding the One like David, a descendant of David, who would come to establish the everlasting kingdom of God.

Matthew will also show that Joseph, Jesus’ father, is a descendant of David. Matthew 1:20 explains, “When he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife.’” This is the only time in the Gospel of Matthew that someone, aside from Jesus, is called son of David. It is designed to show the appropriate lineage of Jesus as the Davidic king. This is why

THE PROMISE OF HIS PROTECTION

one of Matthew's favorite titles for Jesus is Son of David.

Many narratives in this Gospel emphasize the fact that Jesus is the Son of David. Throughout this Gospel the reader will find kingly and authoritative language. Even the last statement of Jesus conveys the idea of a victory speech: " 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth' " (Matthew 28:18).

Consider the excitement of the crowd when Jesus comes into the city in a kingly manner (Matthew 21:1-11). Matthew explains that this is to fulfill what the prophets had said (see Isaiah 62:11; Zechariah 9:9). The crowd was spreading coats and tree branches on the road in front of the coming King, shouting,

" 'Hosanna to the Son of David;

BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD;

Hosanna in the highest!' " (Matthew 21:8, 9; cf. Psalm 118:26).

Little did they understand that Jesus' Davidic kingdom was not of this world. His kingdom would be confirmed through His death on the cross (see Matthew 27:37).

Jesus is our Shepherd

It is life changing to realize that God had a salvation plan from the very beginning. When He called David to be the king of Israel, He had in mind the Davidic King who would come much later, a millennium later, to save not just Israel, but everyone who believes in Him.

Perhaps one of the most exciting visualizations of God is the one where we see God as our Shepherd and Protector. When God says in Ezekiel 34 that He would personally come to feed His sheep, protect them, and defend them, and that He would accomplish that through the new David (meaning Jesus), we capture a glimpse of God's love and zeal for us. He is the one who fights for

MATTHEW

us; He is the one who looks out for us. Jesus is my Shepherd King. He defends me from my foes and from those who oppress me. In the case of Israel, He would defend them from their own leaders, who no longer wanted to care for nor protect the sheep.

When I find myself in a difficult situation that makes me anxious, I visualize myself as a little lamb in Jesus' bosom and recite Psalm 23. David wrote this psalm at the time when he realized that God was the only One who could give him rest, the only One who could guide him, feed him, and protect him. Let's join David in his well-known prayer and song as we envision green pastures and waters of rest. We are His sheep, tired and in need of refreshment. Jesus takes us in His arms:

The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.
He restores my soul (Psalm 23:1-3).

May Jesus, the Davidic Shepherd King, restore your soul and give you true rest.