

# Chapter 3 - The Genealogy of Jesus

## Importance of Genealogies

Two of the most boring parts of the Bible are the table of nations and genealogies. Sometimes we modern readers of the Bible wonder why God even bothered to clutter the Scriptures with genealogical list that are of limited value for us today. As always, there is a reason.

The Messiah was promised through prophecy centuries before the birth of Christ . It was promised that he would be of the lineage of David. The first and immediate test of anyone claiming to be Israel's Messiah was to check the public genealogical tables. It was not possible for someone to claim to be Messiah without the pedigree to prove it. Both Matthew (Mt 1:1-18 ) and Luke (Lk 3:23-38) include the genealogy of Jesus to prove beyond any doubt that he had the genetic background required of the Messiah, that is, he would come from the royal line of David. It was for this reason that Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem for the Roman census. They were both of the house and lineage of David.

Had Jesus not met this first criteria for Messiahship his enemies would have readily been able to publicly condemn him as a pretender, but they could not. The genealogies were kept meticulously by the priest for the purpose of proving who was qualified (or not) for the priesthood, and to check the pedigree of their intended wives. Those genealogies were public material. Josephus states that he could trace his own ancestry to the first of 24 courses of priests, and adds that he "found it in the public tables." In Jesus day the list of priests for 2000 years back could be traced!

These genealogies were important to every family. Children grew up memorizing their genealogy. Jews were very proud of their heritage. Some genealogical records were lost during the Babylonian captivity. In 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed the genealogical records were almost entirely destroyed.

The genealogy of Jesus, being a concurrent document of his day, could have been refuted by his enemies but was not because it was public record. The Holy Spirit inspired both Matthew and Luke to record the genealogy of Jesus for all ages to know the authenticity of Jesus the Messiah.

## Genealogy of Joseph and Mary

Mary and Joseph were of the same lineage - the line of David, though through different lines. Matthew's genealogy is of Joseph's legal line as a descendant of David (Mt.1:17) Matthew similarly tells the story from Joseph's viewpoint while Luke tells the same story from Mary's view. Luke gives the genealogy of Mary. ( Luke 3:23-28) It would appear that Matthew gained his information from Joseph, probably through James, the Lord's brother, while Luke drew his information from Mary. (Douglas, p. 660)

## **Two Different Genealogies**

Matthew and Luke approach the genealogy from different viewpoints. Matthew was set on proving the kingly right of Jesus, so his genealogy followed the male line of Joseph, through the father.

Luke chose to record Mary's genealogy. This was to prove that the blood which flowed from Mary to Jesus was royal. Mary had to be of the same royal line as Joseph according to the law in Numbers 36:8.

## **Matthew's Genealogy of Jesus**

Matthew records the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph the supposed father of Jesus. Matthew used a common genealogical custom of omitting some ancestors since the purpose of this genealogy was not chronology or dating, but establishing the direct line of ancestors back to David. He also uses a common memory tool of dividing the genealogy into three sets of 14 generations - Abraham to David (14), David to Babylonian Captivity (14), the Captivity to Christ (14). This is interesting because it provides us with a history of Israel divided into three segments. He counts 42 generations altogether to David.

## **Four Women**

Another interesting anomaly of Matthew's genealogical list is that he mentions four women. Normally women are not mentioned in a genealogy. Each of these is a Gentile (a non-Jew). Three of the four had a sinful past. They are: Tamar, Rahab the Harlot, Ruth, Bathsheba. What wondrous grace that God should so emphatically prove his undying love and forgiveness. Those transgressions were forgiven and their sins pardoned - just as though they never happened. Thus these women could share in Messiah's lineage as Gentiles and as sinners testifying to the fact that Jesus did indeed come to seek and save that which was lost. And, as his name signified, "He shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." (Mt 1:21)

Let us pause here to underline this truth. Many people don't get "the begats," so they ignore them altogether, but God never intended them to be overlooked. There is a message between the lines. God's forgiveness is total and his love covers a multitude of sins. It is important for us to pass along this truth to weary sojourners in faith who, like these women, have failed. God's grace is sufficient for all our sins. There is no sin he cannot forgive. His forgiveness is total and irrevocable.

## **LESSONS IN FORGIVENESS**

Here are two important lessons to pass on to others in your teaching.

### **1. What God Has Done With Our Sins**

Most Christians struggle with the guilt of sins past. They are confessed and forgiven but often there is a guilt or an accusing finger that leaves them restless and uncomfortable. One of the best things we can do for any believer, new or old is share with them from the Scriptures what God has done with our sins. It helps us visualize what God says is true. Here is what God says about your sins.

1. They were paid in full – Romans 5:11 / Isaiah 53:6
2. They were forgiven/pardoned – 1 John 1:9
3. They were laid on him – Isaiah 53:6
4. They were washed whiter than snow – Isaiah 1:18
5. They were covered – Psalm 32:1
6. They were cleansed by blood of Jesus – Hebrews 9:22/ 10:4
7. They were blotted out – Isaiah 44:22
8. They were removed as far as east from west – Psalm 103:12
9. They were cast in depths of sea – Micah 7:19
10. They were forever forgotten – Jeremiah 31:34

I keep this little tool in the back page of my Bible to help people at the altar or with whom I am counseling find freedom from sins that are past.

The hymn "It Is Well With My Soul" expresses so well what the women in Jesus genealogy must have felt when God told them they would be in Messiah's line.

*My sin, Oh, the bliss of this glorious thought,  
My sin not in part but the whole,  
Has been nailed to the cross,  
And I bear it not more.  
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, Oh my soul!*

### **2. Justified Freely By His Grace**

Most of us hear and parrot the word "justified" but few really understand it. Here is a way to remember and illustrate God's justifying work in our hearts and lives. God does not excuse our wrongs. He doesn't just wink at it, or pass it over. He makes up for it. He does something about sin and sinfulness. He must. It is His law that must be satisfied.

**Let Me Illustrate:**

Notice the sentences on page. Each of them are of differing totals in letters and spaces. That is because there are no perfect sentences so perfectly balanced that they all come to the exact same place at the end of the line. Some leave one space, others five or six spaces, but they don't naturally come out perfect.

This illustrates our sins. We don't all sin alike, but we know there are none perfect, no, not even one. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." It is this "coming short" that stumped publishers when the printing press first came out. Paragraphs always looked sloppy and unbalanced because they ended abruptly. The right side of the page was always jagged. So they invented "JUSTIFICATION OF THE LINES."

Look at your Bible, or just about any published book, and you will see that the right side of the page is perfect. All the letters and words of every sentence come to the exact same measure to the end of the line. That is justification. The printers used to manually put spacers between the words to make the sentence come out just right. That is what God does with us. He justifies us. He makes up that which is lacking. He doesn't just overlook our sins and shortcomings but he makes up what is lacking. Jesus did that for us. He satisfied the justice of God by living the perfect sinless life. Now God adds what he did for us to what we are lacking. That is the meaning of justification.

## **Luke's Genealogy of Jesus**

Luke's genealogy of Jesus is different than Matthew's in several ways. Luke's genealogy is much longer. He seems to be recording every father and son while Matthew skipped a few which was customary.

1. First he follows Mary's lineage, not Joseph's. Perhaps he was aware of Matthew's gospel when he wrote it. But we also know that Luke researched his gospel carefully and had intimate information about the family of Mary. Perhaps he did a personal interview with Mary herself. We don't know.

2. Second he traces the line not just to David or even Abraham, but all the way back to Adam.

3. Third he traces Mary's ancestry back to David through Nathan's line, since Solomon's line failed to produce offspring in Jehoiachin, while Matthew traces Joseph's through Neri.

4. Finally the two genealogies are backward to each other. Luke begins at the character being traced and goes backward in time, while Matthew begins with Abraham and moves forward. One says "who was the father of..", and the other "who was the son of.." That is not a problem except that it makes it more difficult for us to match the lists. (see list below) The names between verses 23 and 27 are not in the Old Testament because they lived between the close of the Old Testament and Jesus' birth.

The two genealogies merge. The lines of Solomon and Nathan (his brother) unite in Zerubbabel by the marriage of Shealtiel (Salathiel) to the daughter of Neri of Nathan's line. Thus Jacob and Heli were brothers. Jacob's daughter was Mary and Heli's son was Joseph. They were first cousins.

# The Genealogical Problems

## Problems With The Genealogies

Very tough questions arise in the genealogies of Matthew and Luke. They deserve a hearing and a reasoned defense by thoughtful Christians. See if you can give a reason of the hope that is in you.

1. Discrepancies: There are too many discrepancies between the genealogy of Matthew and Luke to overlook. The genealogies contradict and do not match. Matthew lists 26 people from Abraham to Jesus, Luke lists 41. Only eighteen names correspond out of the fifty-five generations

2. Why Joseph's Line? If Jesus was not conceived by Joseph why track his ancestry through David? His ancestry is only trackable through God the Father.

3. Who is Joseph's Father? How can Joseph be the "son of Jacob" and the "son of Heli?"

4. The Curse of Jeconiah: How can Jesus be the Messiah when both genealogies track through the cursed King Jeconiah (Jeremiah, chapter 22:30)?

5. Not Solomon's Line: Luke tracks the genealogy of Jesus through David's son Nathan instead of Solomon, when the Scriptures prophecy that the Messiah would be of Solomon's line. (Ezekiel 34:23, 37:21-28; Isaiah 11:1-9; Jeremiah 23:5, 30:7-10, 33:14-16; and Hosea 3:4-5).

## **Answers To The Problems**

### **1. Discrepancies Between the Lists:**

There are several answers to the differences between the two lists. (see the addendum)

First, they are of two different genealogical lists. Luke is following Mary's line, and Matthew follows Joseph's. Luke follows physical descent, while Matthew follows legal lineage of heirship. So we should not be surprised that the lists are not alike. They are not meant to be. Remember Luke is writing at least 10 years after Matthew. Luke is using Matthew's account as one of his sources for his list. Luke also has Mary as an eyewitness and is recording directly from her own commentary.

Second, the number of generations are different. Luke lists 41 progenitors in Mary's line from David to Jesus, Matthew lists only 26. Only 18 names out of 55 match. So why shouldn't they be different? Two sides of a family tree are not identical nor symmetrical. Generations and ancestors do not live and die at the same speed. Some live longer than others.

Third, it was customary, especially in Jewish genealogies, to omit or skip generations of unimportant names. Matthew does this, as do genealogies in the Old Testament. (for examples compare (compare Ezra 7:3 with 1 Chronicles 6:7-10 and 1 Chronicles 22:1, 11 to 24:27; and 2 Kings 23:34 to 24:6) It is not an error. It is a way of simplifying and using memory aids. Remember too, Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience. Luke is writing to Gentiles. The styles and traditions are different.

### **2. Why Joseph's Line?**

The question arises then of why Matthew follows Joseph's line at all since Joseph was not the physical father of Jesus. Joseph has no blood or genetic tie to Jesus Christ since he is not the father. So why trace his lineage? The first reason is that in Matthew's Hebrew world genealogies were traced through the father's side only. That was customary. A second answer would be that Joseph was the representative of Jesus, as an adoptive father. He is legally the heir to Joseph's line and Mary secures his right of inheritance.

According to Numbers 36:6-12, an only daughter had to marry within her own family so as to secure the right of inheritance. (\*Advent/ Encyclopedia/Genealogy of Christ)

### **3. Who Was Joseph's Father?**

Between the two lists one must note right off that as the list begins (or ends) the fathers listed for Joseph are not the same. Luke says that Heli was Joseph's father, while Matthew stated he was the son of Jacob. Who is right? This gets a little complicated so hang on.

View 1: The first view holds that Heli was indeed the father of Mary, not Joseph. The exclusion of Joseph by the phrase '(as it was supposed, of Joseph) "makes Christ, by means of the Blessed Virgin, directly a son of Heli. This view is supported by a tradition which names the father of the Blessed Virgin "Joachim", a variant form of Eliacim or its abbreviation Eli, a variant of Heli, which latter is the form found in the Third Evangelist's genealogy." (\* NewAdvent Encyclopedia/Genealogy of Christ)

This view was the view of the early church fathers as well as a chief opponent of the Gospel, Celsus the Greek Philosopher. It is difficult to argue against when the opponents of Christianity confirm that Mary was of the house and lineage of David. (\* In The Word Ministries)

View 2: Another view, however, insists that both lists are legal genealogies of Joseph (not Mary) but through lineage that converges through levirate marriages thus giving the line through both Solomon and Nathan. This view purports that both Jacob and Heli were legitimate heirs in the lineage stated by each of the evangelists. This view alleges that Heli died childless. According to Jewish law his half-brother, Jacob, married Heli's widow and by her had Joseph. This is known as a "levirate marriage." This meant that physically Jacob (Joseph's father) was son of David through Solomon's line, but Heli was descended from David through Nathan's line. Therefore Joseph was both.

"Jacob and Heli were, therefore, uterine brothers. Heli married, but died without offspring; his widow, therefore, became the levirate wife of Jacob, and gave birth to Joseph, who was the carnal son of Jacob, but the legal son of Heli, thus combining in his person two lineages of David's descendents." (\* NewAdvent Encyclopedia)

We may never know for certain and the argument continues even among evangelicals. What is certain is that there is no contradiction in the genealogies.

"The Jerusalem Talmud shows that Joseph was the son-in-law of Heli. Joseph's father was Jacob. It was customary to refer to a son-in-law as a son in the first century. So Luke's statement was culturally correct." (\* Life of Christ)

#### **4. The Curse of Jeconiah:**

One of the characters in direct lineage of David that appears in Matthew's genealogy is cursed by God. It appears in Jeremiah 36:1-32. Jeconiah who was also known as Coniah, was the son of Jehoiakim, a king of Judah. Coniah was the last king of Judah in the direct line of King David. He angered God by cutting and burning the scroll that Jeremiah the prophet wrote. (See List of Kings)

God cursed Jehoiakim promising that none of his children would sit on the throne of David (Jeremiah 22:24-30 & Jeremiah 36:29-31). And although Jehoiakim had children, scripture shows that none of them ever reigned as King David had. His son ruled just 100



days before being removed. His descendant, Zerubbabel, who led the first captives back to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple, did not rule as king.

Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus, was one of Jehoiakim's descendants (through Jeconiah). Neither Joseph, nor his offspring could claim David's throne because of that curse. Many questions are raised in the issue of Jeconiah's curse, one being how can anyone come from the direct line of David and Solomon if that line is roadblocked by this curse? The answer apparently is that NO ONE can become the king of Israel through Jeconiah's line, thus no direct descendant of Solomon can sit on the throne. In fact,

Solomon sinned before Jeconiah by pursuing foreign wives. Had Joseph been the physical father of Jesus he would have been disqualified and thus Jesus disqualified to sit on David's throne. Yet God legitimized Jesus' claim to the throne through Mary's lineage, and through her marriage to Joseph whereby she is granted legal rights of inheritance (not the throne).

Note: It must be noted that on this point many opponents to the Gospel have been led astray blaspheming Jesus Christ as a usurper to the throne. Among these are Muslims and those of the Bahai Faith. And so the prophecy of John in Revelation finds its fulfillment:

Revelation 12:13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.

### **5.The Nathan Problem:**

Next we come to the problem of Mary's claim to the throne of David through Nathan, not Solomon. The aforementioned problem of the Jeconiah curse should itself pave the way for an understanding of why God chose to circumvent Solomon's line.

"Since Matthew and Luke clearly record much common material, it is certain that neither one could unknowingly incorporate such a flagrant apparent mistake as the wrong genealogy in his record. As it is, however, the two genealogies show that both parents were descendants of David--Joseph through Solomon (Matthew 1:7-15), thus inheriting the legal right to the throne of David, and Mary through Nathan (Luke 3:23-31), her line thus carrying the seed of David, since Solomon's line had been refused the throne because of Jeconiah's sin" [Dr. Henry M. Morris, *The Defender's Study Bible*, note for Luke 3:23 (Iowa Falls, Iowa: World Publishing, Inc., 1995).].

And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, 10 And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded. 11 Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. (I Kings 11:9)