

The Genealogies of Jesus

Researched by
Archie Miller, D.Min.

The New Testament includes two genealogies of Jesus of Nazareth, one in Matthew 1:1-17, and another in Luke 3:23-38. They are supremely important to the argument of the New Testament concerning the person and claims of Jesus.

The Mattheian Genealogy

The purpose of Matthew's genealogy

Matthew is writing his genealogy to a Jewish audience to demonstrate that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the long-awaited Messiah of Israel. The Jewish reader is poised to say "Prove it! Is Jesus a descendant of Abraham? Is Jesus a legitimate descendant of King David?"

Matthew couldn't be clearer. He establishes the facts in just 17 words:

Matthew 1:1 (NASB)

1 The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham:

The importance of the Davidic lineage is seen in the promise made by God:

2 Samuel 7:12-13 (NASB)

12 "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Psalm 89:4 (NASB)

4 I will establish your seed forever And build up your throne to all generations.

This promise had been the hope of the Jewish believers for centuries. Every time they ascended to Jerusalem, they sang the songs of praise and remembrance:

Psalm 132:10-12 (NASB)

10 For the sake of David Your servant, Do not turn away the face of Your anointed. 11 The LORD has sworn to David A truth from which He will not turn back: "Of the fruit of your body I will set upon your throne. 12 "If your sons will keep My covenant And My testimony which I will teach them, Their sons also shall sit upon your throne forever."

Their hope was in the coming Messiah, but He must be a son of David and a son of Abraham. That is what Matthew clearly accomplishes in 17 words.

What is Distinctive about Matthew's Genealogy?

Unlike most genealogies, Matthew arranges his listing so it was easily memorized. He divides it into 3 sections each containing 14 generations. To maintain the symmetry, he counts Jehoiachin twice.

When you compare Matthew to the chronology given in Chronicles, you see the difference.

1 Chronicles 3:10-12 (NASB)

10 Now Solomon's son was Rehoboam, Abijah was his son, Asa his son, Jehoshaphat his son, 11 Joram his son, Ahaziah his son, Joash his son, 12 Amaziah his son, Azariah his son, Jotham his son,

Matthew leaves out Joram, Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah. The omission does not affect the integrity of Matthew's list, as all Jews would know the descendants.

This demonstrates that Jesus fulfills the first test of being a descendant of King David, and he does it in an easily memorizable listing.

However, there is another distinctive, and that is Matthew includes 4 women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Each of them was important to understanding the humanity of the Messiah.

The Lukeian Genealogy

The purpose of Luke's genealogy

Whereas Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience, Luke was writing some 30 years later to a Greek audience. Matthew wrote to prove the legal right of Jesus to the throne of King David.

On the other hand, Luke is writing to establish the genuine humanity of Jesus, to demonstrate the truth of Jesus' claim to be the "Son of Man." Luke's genealogy traces the lineage of Jesus not only to David (3:31) and Abraham (3:34), but all the way back to "Adam, the son of God" (3:38). This is unusual, but by this means Luke's proves that Jesus is truly man, and thus that "the Messiah belongs not to Israel alone, but to sinners of all times and all nations.

What is Distinctive about Luke's Genealogy?

One distinctive is that Luke reverses the standard genealogical order by beginning with Jesus and working backwards in time to Adam. He is clearly writing for a specific reason:

Luke 1:1-4 (NASB)

¹ Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; ⁴ so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

Certainly Mary is still alive at this time, as were many others whom Luke interviewed. The way he constructs his listing indicates that he has investigated the Public Documents, and traces Jesus's lineage back to Adam to God.

When the Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote his genealogy, he also drew on those Public Documents. This is important, because in the fourth century, the Christian historian, Eusebius wrote that Herod had destroyed the Public Documents. Clearly Eusebius was wrong. When

Augustus called for a census, it was based on those Public Documents. These Public Documents were kept in the Temple and in the Synagogues

Since those documents were so important, they could be examined to verify Luke's written genealogy, and if Luke were not accurate he would have been refuted. Unbelievers would be quick to discredit Jesus' claims. Those unbelievers knew that if Jesus' claim to Davidic and Abrahamic ancestry could be disproved, He would be demonstrated to be just another false Messiah. But no such attempt at discrediting the genealogies appears. This is powerful testimony to the demonstrable veracity of these documents.

Can the Genealogies be Reconciled

It is worth noting that Matthew, who wrote principally for the Jews, extends his genealogy to Abraham through whom the promise of the Messiah was given to the Jews; but Luke, who wrote his history for the instruction of the Gentiles, extends his genealogy to Adam, to whom the promise of the Redeemer was given in behalf of himself and of all his posterity.

From Abraham to David, the lists are comparable. It's from David to Christ that the difficulties arise, even though both lists seem to trace the line of Jesus' adopted father, Joseph.

Matthew 1:16 (NASB)

16 Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

Luke 3:23 (NASB)

23 When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli,

Luke declares to Theophilus that he is setting forth **the exact truth about the things you have been taught.**

How does one reconcile that Joseph's father is Jacob in Matthew, and Eli in Luke? The Hebrews never permitted women to enter into their genealogical tables, whenever a family happened to end with a daughter, instead of naming her in the genealogy, they inserted her husband, as the son of him who was, in reality, but his father-in-law. Jesus was

considered according to law to be the son of Joseph, as he was the son-in-law of Heli, whose own father was Jacob.

Matthew 1:16 (NASB)

16 Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born,

1 Chronicles 3:16-19 (NASB)

16 The sons of Jehoiakim were Jeconiah his son, Zedekiah his son. ¹⁷

The sons of Jeconiah, the prisoner, were Shealtiel his son, ¹⁸ and Malchiram, Pedaiah, Shenazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama and Nedabiah. ¹⁹ The sons of Pedaiah were Zerubbabel and Shimei. And the sons of Zerubbabel were Meshullam and Hananiah

This compares favorably with

Matthew 1:12 (NASB)

12 After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel.

Then Luke adds this commentary on the genealogical list

Luke 3:27 (NASB)

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

This reference by Luke to Neri is the only reference to him in the Bible. Even though Neri isn't mentioned in the lists of 1 Chronicles chapter 3, he is included by the Holy Spirit in the genealogical list of Luke. Thus it appears that Joseph, son of Jacob, according to Matthew, was son-in-law of Heli, according to Luke. And Salathiel, son of Jechonias, according to the former, was son-in-law of Neri, according to the latter. Mary therefore appears to have been the daughter of Heli, which an abbreviation for Heliachim, which is the same in Hebrew as Joachim.

Joseph, son of Jacob, and Mary; daughter of Heli, were of the same family: both came from Zerubbabel; Joseph from Abiud, his eldest son, Matthew 1:13, and Mary by Rhesa, the youngest.

Thus it appears that Jesus, son of Mary, reunited in himself all the blood, privileges, and rights of the whole family of David; in consequence of which he is emphatically called, **The son of David.**

Matthew has been following Joseph. Luke is providing the genealogy of Jesus' physical mother, Mary. According to Luke 3:23, one of her ancestors is named Eli.

In the list of progenitors of Jesus that Luke gives in 3:23-38, each name has the definite article "**the son of**" given with each name except that of Joseph. Matthew also has the article in every name. This is compelling evidence that this name ought not be read as part of Luke's genealogical list; rather, it is part of the parenthetical statement inserted in that verse. The verse should read, "**Jesus Himself . . . being the son, as was supposed of Joseph, of Eli.**"

It is not Joseph who is "the son of Eli," but Jesus.

Eli is best identified as the father of Mary, and the father-in-law of Joseph. This makes Eli the physical and legal grandfather of Jesus. Luke is dealing with a dilemma arising from the fact of Jesus' virgin birth.

Jewish progenitor genealogy was not to be traced through a man's mother, but through his father. But by reason of His supernatural conception in the womb of a virgin, Jesus had no physical father. Thus, His physical genealogy had to be traced through his nearest male relative, His maternal grandfather, whose name Luke gives in 3:23 as Eli.

Another very important fact is the attention to Mary given by Luke in 1:26-35 and 2:19, 51, which is in contrast to Matthew's nativity narrative. Matthew only mentions Mary only as the wife of Joseph.

Given Luke's focus on Mary in his telling of the nativity, it is arguable that Luke is focusing on Mary.

Matthew is recording the physical descent of Joseph and Luke is giving the physical ancestry.

When the angel spoke to Joseph, he said

Matthew 1:20 (NASB)

20 Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

When the angel Gabriel visited Mary in Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy, Luke records it this way

Luke 1:26-31 (NASB)

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a

city in Galilee called Nazareth,²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.²⁸ And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord *is* with you."²⁹ But she was very perplexed at *this* statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was.³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God."³¹ "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.

This tells us that Luke is viewing the birth of Jesus from the viewpoint of Mary, herself.

Matthew records the visit of The Angel of the Lord, who appeared to Joseph, this way

Matthew 1:18-25 (NASB)

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.²⁰ But 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; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."²¹ "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."²² Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:²³ **"BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,"** which translated means, "GOD WITH US."²⁴ And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife,²⁵ but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

Both Matthew and Luke are explaining Jesus' right to the Throne of King David. There are two considerations that they resolve. Solomon was the son of David to whom the throne had been promised (2 Samuel 12:25), and thus the legal authority to occupy that throne must descend through him. Because Jesus' adopted father, Joseph, traced his lineage to David through Solomon, Jesus inherited that prerogative.

Matthew 1:17 (NASB)

17 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.

And, Mary was also a descendant of David, for the Angel Gabriel says of her

Luke 1:31-32 (NASB)

31 "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David;

Luke 2:4-5 (NASB)

4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, 5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.

Both Joseph, who was a descendant of David, and Mary, who also was a descendant of David, were required to be enrolled in **the city of David which is called Bethlehem.**

Another significant point is that Jesus' virgin birth eliminates a huge problem that relates to is Jeconiah, a king who is identified by Matthew as an ancestor of Joseph (1:11-12). Jeremiah pronounced a curse upon Jeconiah,

Jeremiah 22:24-30 (NASB)

24 "As I live," declares the LORD, "even though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were a signet ring on My right hand, yet I would pull you off; 25 and I will give you over into the hand of those who are seeking your life, yes, into the hand of those whom

you dread, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of the Chaldeans. ²⁶ "I will hurl you and your mother who bore you into another country where you were not born, and there you will die. ²⁷ "But as for the land to which they desire to return, they will not return to it. ²⁸ "Is this man Coniah a despised, shattered jar? Or is he an undesirable vessel? Why have he and his descendants been hurled out And cast into a land that they had not known? ²⁹ "O land, land, land, Hear the word of the LORD! ³⁰ "Thus says the LORD, 'Write this man down childless, A man who will not prosper in his days; For no man of his descendants will prosper Sitting on the throne of David Or ruling again in Judah.'"

Joseph could not claim title to the Throne because the curse was on him. However, Jesus was only Joseph's adopted son, not physical son.

That is why the virgin birth of Jesus absolutely necessary. Jesus was not the physical son of David through Joseph, but through Mary. Look again at

Matthew 1:16 (NASB)

16 Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

The relative pronoun, "by whom," in the Greek, is feminine singular.

The Apostle Paul declares

Romans 1:3 (NASB)

3 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,

Jesus is genuinely a son of David through Mary according to the flesh because of the virgin birth and nonparticipation in the seed of Joseph. Jesus qualifies to receive the title without coming under the curse.

The careful bible student knows, that when properly understood, these genealogies—though uninteresting and perhaps even irrelevant to modern readers, become a marvelous attestation of

Romans 11:33-36 (NASB)

33 the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His

ways! ... ³⁶ For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.