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Genealogy of Jesus Christ

Matthew 1: 1-17 and Luke 3: 23-38 give the genealogy of Jesus. Matthew recorded Joseph's lineage, while Luke gave the family tree of Mary.

[Interpretation](#) - Obtain a first century perspective on genealogies. Learn why the Israelites kept careful family records.

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[Print me](#) - A printer friendly version of this complete article. For those who prefer to study off-line.

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Interpretation principals

To better understand the genealogy of Jesus, it is important to know some of the notions Jews had regarding ancestral records. This section discusses property rights, prophecies, and Jewish use of the word *son*.

Property rights

Jews carefully maintained accurate genealogical records. They did so primarily because property rights in Israel were linked to family heritage.

When the Jews settled in Israel, the tribes were given portions of the land as an inheritance. Families within each tribe were given parcels of that land. The land could be farmed, developed, or sold. Every 50 years a dispossessed family could lay claim to the parcel of land which their ancestors had received when it was originally distributed.

Individuals who could not trace their family had no inheritance in the nation of Israel. They were treated as dispossessed foreigners. This factor alone contributed strongly to the Jewish preoccupation with genealogies.

Prophecies

Prophecies also contributed to Jewish interest in genealogies. God had promised several people that the messiah would be one of their descendants. To prove this descent, it was important to maintain accurate genealogical records. The table below shows the promises and their fulfillment.

Person	Promise	Fulfillment
Adam	Genesis 3:15	Luke 3:38
Abraham	Genesis 22:18	Matthew 1:1-2 Luke 3:34
Judah	Genesis 49:10 Micah 5:2	Matthew 1:2-3 Luke 3:33
Jesse	Isaiah 11:1, 10	Matthew 1:5-6 Luke 3:33
David	2nd Samuel 7:12-13	Matthew 1:1 & 6 Luke 3:31

Use of the word "Son"

The Jews did not use the word *son* in a limited sense, as we do today.

Matthew 1:1 states Jesus was the "son of David, the son of Abraham." This appears to indicate that David was the father of Jesus, and Abraham was his grandfather. A Jew would have understood that Matthew did not mean there was only one generation between these men; but that Jesus was a descendant

of David, who was a descendant of Abraham. This fact is born out in the verses that follow (Matthew 1:2-17).

In the Jewish mind, **the word *son* could be applied to one who was not a literal, first generation son**, as is commonly understood today. It could mean a descendant; which could be a grandson, great grandson, or son of a more distant generation.

The custom of skipping generations can be called "genealogical abridgement."

Genealogical abridgement

Genealogical abridgement occurs not only in Matthew 1:1, but also in the Old Testament. Compare Ezra 7:3 with 1st Chronicles 6:7-10, and you can see how Ezra deliberately skipped six generations from Meriaoth to Azariah (son of Johanan).

Son could also be used to describe kinship without sonship. Although Zerubbabel was the nephew of Shealtiel (1st Chronicles 3:17-19), he was called the "son of Shealtiel" (Ezra 3:2, Nehemiah 12:1, Haggai 1:12).

Jair is another example of this principle. He was a distant son-in-law of Manasseh (1st Chronicles 2:21-23 and 7:14-15); yet, he was called the "son of Manasseh" (Numbers 32:41, Deuteronomy 3:14, 1st Kings 4:13).

The point to remember is that the word *son* can be applied to several types of relationships.

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Matthew's genealogy of Jesus

Matthew wrote to the Jews to present Jesus as King of the Jews. The account is in Matthew 1: 1-17.

It begins by showing Jesus was a legal heir to the throne of David, by virtue of his lineage. This fact is immediately set forth in verse one, which states Jesus was the "son of David, the son of Abraham." His kinship to David the King of Israel is mentioned before that of Abraham, the father of Israel.

Matthew's genealogy traces the ancestors of Joseph, the legal father of Jesus.

Structure of Genealogy

Matthew's structure descends from father to son, beginning with Abraham. Additionally, he divides the genealogy into three groups of fourteen generations, separated by important historic points (Matthew 1:17).

Three Divisions

The three divisions of Matthew's genealogy are:

1. Abraham to the reign of King David (Matthew 1:2-6).
2. David's kingdom to the Babylonian captivity (Matthew 1:6-11).
3. Release from Babylonian captivity to Christ (Matthew 1:12-16).

Names in Matthew's Account

The names in each division appear below.

Abraham to David	David to Captivity	Release to Christ
Abraham	David	Jeconiah
Isaac	Solomon	Shealtiel
Jacob	Abijah	Zerubbabel
Judah	Asa	Abiud
Perez	Jehoshaphat	Eliakim
Hezron	Joram	Azor
Ram	Uzziah	Zadok
Amminadab	Jotham	Achim
Nashon	Ahaz	Eliud
Salmon	Hezekiah	Eleazar
Boaz	Manasseh	Matthan
Obed	Amon	Jacob
Jesse	Josiah	Joseph
David	Jeconiah	Jesus Christ

An Abridged Genealogy

Matthew abridged the genealogy by omitting some names that appear in earlier records. Some speculate that the abridged arrangement was intended to aid in memorization. Genealogical abridgement has biblical precedent, as was disussed earlier.

Repeated Names

It is important to note that Matthew did not say there was a total of 42 generations (i.e. 14 multiplied by 3). He respectively indicated that there were 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the Babylonian Captivity, and 14 from the release to Christ.

The names of David and Jeconiah are repeated in the genealogy. David's name was repeated because he was alive when the first division ended, and when the second division began.

Jeconiah's name may have been repeated because of a transcription error. Jeconiah's father was Jehoiakim. The names had similar spellings. Given the fact that some ancient manuscripts contain both names, it is not unreasonable to admit that a transcriber may have overlooked the different spellings, and repeated Jeconiah's name.

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Women in Christ's Genealogy

Matthew included five women in his genealogy of Christ. This is notable since it was not customary for Jews to include women in their records.

Even more remarkable is the fact that Matthew included some women who had disreputable histories. The five women included were: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary.

Tamar: Genesis 38:6-30

Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Judah. She was a childless widow, who was given to her brother-in-law after her husband's death. By this marriage, her offspring would continue the name and inheritance of the deceased. Such a union was later called a Leverite marriage (Deut 25:5-6).

Unfortunately, Tamar's brother-in-law refused to have proper intercourse with her. God killed him for this. Afterwards, Judah would not give Tamar to any of his other sons. So Tamar disguised herself as a harlot and seduced Judah. Through him, she became the mother of Perez.

Rahab: Joshua 2:1-24

Rahab was a harlot who lived in Jericho. She hid the spies of Joshua. Because of this, the Israelites spared her life when they conquered Jericho. She later became the wife of Salmon, and the mother of Boaz. Rahab's faith was later commended (Heb 11:30-31).

Ruth: Ruth 1:1-4:22

Ruth was a foreigner from the land of Moab. She was the widow of a Jew. Her mother-in-law, Naomi, also lived in Moab. Naomi journeyed to Israel after her family died. Ruth's devotion was extraordinary. She left her own country to follow Naomi. While in Israel, Ruth was married to Boaz, one of Naomi's relatives. Ruth later became the mother of Obed, the grandfather of David the King.

Bathsheba: 2 Samuel 11:1-27

Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, who was a soldier in the army of King David. She and David had an adulterous affair.

When David discovered Bathsheba was pregnant, he tried to cover it up by summoning Uriah home from war, hoping that Uriah would have intercourse with his wife. Uriah came home to Jerusalem, but refused to lay with Bathsheba as long as the armies of Israel were at war.

So, David sent Uriah back into battle, with orders that Uriah should be withdrawn from when the fighting became fierce. After Uriah was slain in this manner, David took Bathsheba as his own

wife. God punished them for this by killing their first child.
Bathsheba later became the mother of Solomon.

Mary: Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-56

Mary was the mother of Jesus and the wife of Joseph. She was a virgin when Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Joseph was betrothed to Mary when he discovered she was pregnant. He intended to put her away secretly because this was shameful. However, an angel told Joseph what had happened. So Joseph took Mary as his wife, and kept her as a virgin until she gave birth to Jesus.

During her pregnancy, Mary spent time with her relative Elizabeth, who was the mother of John the Baptist (Luke 1:39-56). Mary was not a perpetual virgin, as she later became the mother of other sons and daughters (Matthew 13:55-56).

Mary was a widow at the time of Jesus' death. While on the cross, Jesus committed her to the care of John, his apostle (John 19:25-27).

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Luke's Genealogy of Jesus

This record is in Luke 3:23-38. Luke was a physician. He carefully investigated the life of Christ, and wrote the books of Luke and Acts (Colossians 4:14, Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1).

Luke's Audience

The original readers of Luke's works were Greek Christians. While Matthew wrote to the Jews, Luke wrote to the Greeks.

Matthew's genealogy emphasized Jesus' claim to the throne of David. Since Luke's readers were less concerned about the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy, his genealogy focused on Jesus' descent from God. It placed no emphasis on Jesus being the descendant of King David.

Reason for Differences

Differences between the genealogies of Matthew and Luke may be attributed to the fact that Matthew traced the ancestry of Joseph, while Luke traced the that of Mary.

Unique Placement of the Genealogy

The placement of Luke's genealogy is after the baptism of Christ. When Jesus was baptized, God said "This is my beloved son." Immediately following this event, as if to prove God's declaration, Luke inserted the genealogy.

Encouragement to Greek Christians

The genealogy culminated by showing Jesus was the "son of Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3:28). This emphasized the humanity of Jesus, and the equality of all christians, regardless of ethnic backgrounds.

Christians of Jewish descent originally considered Greek Christians as inferior to themselves (Acts 15:1-31, Galatians 2:11-16). Luke's genealogy underscored the fact that Jesus was the son of God. Since all men are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), this may have been a source of encouragement to the Greek Christians.

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Joseph in Christ's genealogy

Matthew and Luke showed that Joseph was a legal parent, but not a genetic parent to Jesus. Jesus was miraculously conceived in Mary, through the Holy Spirit. By virtue of being Mary's husband, Joseph was considered the father of Jesus. Since Jesus was born into Joseph's family, he was a legal heir. Through Joseph, Jesus obtained a rightful claim to the throne of David.

Although Jesus was a legal descendant to Joseph, he was not a physical descendant. Luke's genealogy directly addressed this issue by stating Jesus was "supposedly the son of Joseph" (Luke 3:23). Clearly, people had assumed that Joseph was the biological father of Jesus, when in fact he was not (Matthew 13:55).

Who was Joseph's Father?

At first glance, Matthew and Luke appear to be in disagreement as to who Joseph's father was. Matthew states he was the son of Jacob, while Luke states he was the son of Heli. Fortunately, an unlikely source has aided scholars in unraveling this mystery.

The Jerusalem Talmud indicates that Mary was the daughter of Heli (Haggigah, Book 77, 4). Joseph was the son-in-law of Heli. Luke could rightfully call Joseph the "son of Heli" because this was in compliance with use of the word "son" at that time. Moreover, designating a son-in-law as a son had scriptural precedent. Refer to [Son in Jewish Genealogies](#) for more on this topic.

Thus, Joseph was the son of Jacob, and the son-in-law of Heli.

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The Curse of Jehoiakim

An unusual curse in Jeremiah 36: 1-32 gives new insight into the virgin birth of Jesus.

The Curse

Jehoiakim was a king of Israel. He angered God by burning a scroll that Jeremiah the prophet wrote. God cursed Jehoiakim by indicating that none of his children would sit on the throne of David (Jeremiah 36:29-31). And although Jehoiakim had children, scripture shows that none of them ever reigned as King David had.

The Problem

Joseph, the father of Jesus, was one of Jehoiakim's descendants (through Jeconiah). Joseph's offspring could not claim David's throne because of the curse. Jesus laid claim to the throne of David (Luke 1:32, Acts 2:30, Hebrews 12:2). If Jesus had been born of Joseph, the curse would have been contradicted.

Also, God had promised David that one of his physical descendants would reign on the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13). As explained above, Joseph was excluded from being the genetic father of the future king of Israel.

It was impossible to fulfill the requirements of both curse and promise by natural means. One man had to be both heir to and offspring of David, without being the genetic descendant of Jehoiakim. This problem required a divine solution.

The Solution

God created a solution through the miracle of the virgin birth. Although Joseph was one of Jehoiakim's offspring (through Solomon), Mary was not. She was a descendant of Nathan, one of David's other sons (Luke 3:31). God's promise to David was fulfilled because Mary was the biological parent of Jesus.

The virgin birth also addressed the curse God had pronounced upon Jehoiakim. Kingship was an inherited right. By Joseph, Jesus inherited a legal claim to the throne of David. However, he was exempt from the curse of Jehoiakim because Joseph was not his genetic father.

So the miracle of the virgin birth accomplished God's will in two ways. First, it granted Jesus a legal claim to the throne of David. And second, it maintained the integrity of the curse God had pronounced upon Jehoiakim. Indeed, Jesus was not one of Jehoiakim's offspring.

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Alleged Discrepancies

A discussion of the genealogies would be incomplete without considering some of the apparent discrepancies between the records. Some of the most common objections are raised here.

Those which are addressed in greater detail in the preceding information, are briefly recapped.

1. If Matthew indicated there were 42 generations from Abraham to Jesus, why do only 40 names appear in his genealogy?

This is a common objection, which a cursory look at Matthew 1:17 would seem to justify.

However, careful examination shows that Matthew broke the genealogy down into three historic divisions, each of which contained fourteen generations. Two of the names are repeated. David's was repeated because he was alive when the first division ended, and the second division began.

It is widely held that Jeconiah's name was repeated because of a mistranslation. Jeconiah's father's name was Jehoiakim. The names had similar spellings. Apparently the oversight of transcribers caused the name to be repeated. This scenario has added credibility because some ancient manuscripts actually do contain both names.

2. Matthew's genealogy is inconsistent with Old Testament records, that show Matthew skipped generations.

Matthew's genealogy was deliberately abridged. This may have been to aid in memorization of the tables. Old Testament writers also abridged their genealogical records, so Matthew had scriptural precedent to do so (compare Ezra 7:3 with 1 Chronicles 6:7-10).

3. Comparison shows that Matthew and Luke did not record the same names in their genealogies. Since they are not in harmony with each other, one or both of them must be erroneous.

Matthew and Luke traced two family histories. Matthew recorded the ancestors of Joseph, the legal father of Jesus. Luke recorded the ancestors of Mary, the biological mother of Jesus. The divergence of names is natural, given the fact that both authors presented two different family trees.

4. Luke stated that Joseph was the son of Heli, while Matthew stated he was the son of Jacob.

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.



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Closing Remarks

"Instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation, rather than furthering the administration of God..."

~ Paul's advice to Timothy (1 Timothy 1:3-4)

Paul's Advice

Paul gave Timothy sound advice. The differences in the genealogies raise many questions. Admittedly, much of the documentation that would enable us to draw absolute conclusions is not available.

Instead of dwelling on the many speculations regarding the genealogies, this article has focused on presenting the most probable truths.

Response of 1st Century Jews

Many first century Jews were literate, vocal opponents of Christianity. Unlike modern scholars, they had access to the original genealogical records. Had the genealogies been inaccurate, it would have been easy for a first century Jew to prove that they were.

Although the Jews were both predisposed to and capable of refuting the genealogies, they did not. One might conclude that their silence is testimony to the accuracy of the gospel writers.

Other Issues

Brevity and clarity have been key considerations in this work. The material presented here has been limited to that which this author deems most relevant and credible.

It would be remiss to disregard other issues related to the genealogies. The following issues have not been presented, but may be of interest.

- Roman burning of the genealogical records.
- The many Levirate marriage possibilities.
- Theories that both genealogies are through Joseph.
- The debate over Shealtiel and Zerubbabel.

Links

Much has been written regarding the genealogy of Jesus. Some additional sites which further explore this topic are indicated below.

[The Genealogies of the Bible: A Neglected Subject](#)
[The Genealogies in Matthew and Luke](#)

[Problems in the Genealogies of Jesus](#)
[Quartz Hill School of Theology](#)

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