

## THE GENEALOGIES

St. Paul summarized the Christian message in the shortest possible way: *Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel...* (2 Ti. 2:8). While all Christians recognize the centrality of the resurrection, many Christians find the genealogies to be tedious and irrelevant. Still, two of the four gospels feature genealogies of Jesus (Mt. 1:2-17; Lk. 3:23-38), and both demonstrate that Jesus came from the family of David, just as the prophets repeatedly predicted (Is. 16:5; 55:3-5; Je. 23:5-6; 30:8-9; 33:14-26; Eze. 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Ho. 3:5; Zec. 12:7—13:1).

The problem is that the two genealogies are not the same. They match between Abraham and David, but after David they seem to follow two branches of the family, Matthew following Solomon (2 Sa. 12:24) and Luke following Nathan (2 Sa. 5:14). Various resolutions have been offered. The most likely is that Matthew gives the family descent of Joseph, Jesus' legal father, while Luke gives the descent of Mary, Jesus' actual mother,<sup>1</sup> but it is only fair to say that sparse evidence makes all solutions a bit tentative.

### FAMILY PEDIGREES

*Family pedigrees were extremely important in the Jewish world. After the return from exile, racial purity was of paramount concern (Ezr. 2:59, 62//Ne. 7:61, 64; 9:1-2). Even the simplest Israelite, by the time of Jesus, knew his immediate ancestors and could identify to which of the twelve tribes he/she belonged. The social classes of Jewry were dominated by this exercise, not to mention it was necessary for participation in temple worship. The greater number of Jews could trace their tribal descendancy through Judah, as is understandable given the Babylonian exile. The most important family in Judah was the family of David, especially since the messianic hope was linked to this family. Thus, it was no insignificant matter when Matthew began his account of the life of Jesus the Messiah by tracing Jesus' lineage back to David and Abraham (Mt. 1:1).*

### Matthew

Abraham  
Isaac  
Jacob  
Judah  
Perez  
Hezron  
Ram  
Amminadab  
Nahshon  
Salmon  
Boaz  
Obed  
Jesse  
David

### 1 Chronicles

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Set of 14 Generations

Abraham  
Isaac  
Israel  
Judah  
Perez  
Hezron  
Ram  
Amminadab  
Nahshon  
Salma or Salmon  
Boaz  
Obed  
Jesse  
David

### Luke

#### Adam to Abraham

Abraham  
Isaac  
Jacob  
Judah  
Perez  
Hezron  
Ram  
Amminadab  
Nahshon  
Salmon or Sala  
Boaz  
Obed  
Jesse  
David

<sup>1</sup>This harmonization goes back at least to the time of Luther and places great stress on the phrase in Lk. 3:23, that Jesus was "the son, so it was thought, of Joseph." Accordingly, it is suggested that this phrase links Jesus to Mary rather than to Joseph, and there is a supporting reference in the Talmud that Mary was the daughter of Heli.

## BIRTH NARRATIVES

**2<sup>nd</sup> Set of 14 Generations**

Solomon ben David	Solomon ben David	Nathan ben David
Rehoboam	Rehoboam	Mattatha
Abijah	Abijah	Menna
Asa	Asa	Melea
Jehoshaphat	Jehoshaphat	Eliakim
Joram	Joram	Jonam
Uzziah (Ahaziah)	Ahaziah (Uzziah)	Joseph
	Joash	Judah
	Amaziah	Simeon
	Azariah	Levi
Jotham	Jotham	Matthat
Ahaz	Ahaz	Jorim
Hezekiah	Hezekiah	Eliezer
Manasseh	Manasseh	Joshua
Amon	Amon	Er
Josiah	Josiah	Elmadam
	Jehoiakim	Cosam
Jeconiah (Jehoiachin)	Jeconiah (Jehoiachin)	Addi

**3<sup>rd</sup> Set of 14 Generations**

		Melki
		Neri
Shealtiel	Pedaiah <sup>2</sup>	Shealtiel
Zerubbabel	Zerubbabel	Zerubbabel
Abiud	Hananiah	Rhesa
Eliakim	Shecaniah	Joanan
Azor	Neariah	Joda
Zadok	Elioenai	Josech
Akim		Semein
Eliud		Mattathias
Eleazar		Maath
Matthan		Naggai
Jacob		Esli
		Nahum
		Amos
		Mattathias
		Joseph
		Jannai
		Melki
		Levi
		Matthat
		Heli
Joseph/Mary		Joseph
Jesus		Jesus

Each of the genealogies has distinctive features. Luke traces Jesus' ancestry all the way back to Adam, a genealogy that would effectively relate Jesus not only to the royal line of the kings of Judah, but also to the entire human family. The designation of Adam as the son of God (Lk. 3:38) implies his direct creation by God, and it links the First Adam, who was the father of the human race, with the

<sup>2</sup> Both Matthew and Luke follow the LXX of Ezr. 3:2, 8; 5:2 and Ne. 12:1. The MT makes Pedaiah ben Jeconiah the father of Zerubbabel, but a widely accepted explanation is that Shealtiel died childless, and his brother, Pedaiah, fathered a son through levirate marriage so that the child was reckoned to the deceased.

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Second Adam, Jesus, whose coming would have equal universal significance. Matthew, on the other hand, quite deliberately structures his genealogy into three sets of 14 generations, even abridging the list in order to make the number 14 apparent.

## MATTHEW'S LITERARY ART

Matthew's genealogical structure of three symmetrical groups, each of 14 generations, is obviously deliberate (1:17). The first set of 14 generations are identical between Matthew, Luke, and the OT. The second set of 14 generations has been abridged by Matthew in order to achieve the number 14. In the third set, it is not entirely clear how Matthew arrives at the number 14, though he obviously intends this to be the case. It may be that David is counted twice (once at the end of the first group and once at the beginning of the second group), while Jeconiah belongs to the third group only. It may be that Jeconiah is counted twice, once at the end of the second group and once at the beginning of the third group. Alternatively, if one is to avoid repeating a name, it may be that Mary is counted in the third group (as I have done above), thus alluding to the two different lines for Jesus, one legal (Joseph) and one natural (Mary).

Matthew breaks the pattern of the verb structure in 1:16, moving from the active to the passive voice.<sup>3</sup> In the lengthy series of "A fathered B" and "B fathered C," Matthew breaks this pattern when he says, "Jacob fathered Joseph, the husband of Mary, out of whom<sup>4</sup> was born Jesus."

Matthew's genealogy of Jesus begins in a very special way with the phrase *biblos geneleos* (= [the] book of [the] generation), a phrase that corresponds exactly to the *toledot* (= generations) of Genesis in the LXX (1:1, 17; cf. Ge. 2:4a; 5:1). As such, the genesis of Jesus, like the original creation, marks a new era in time. The term *genesis* (= generation, origin, birth) is telescopic in that it can refer not only to the immediately following genealogy but also to the birth of Jesus itself (and does so in 1:18).

Next, the three symmetrical periods of 14 generations each is a structure that required the tailoring of the genealogical tables available from the OT. The reason, while no doubt clear enough to the original readers, is not immediately clear to most modern readers. The likely answer comes from *gematria*, and if so, then the number 14 emphasizes that Jesus was from the family of David, since the numerical equivalent of the name David in Hebrew is 14.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, Matthew intends the three sets of 14 generations to be significant.

**GEMATRIA**

*Gematria is a symbolic way of expressing an idea through the numerical value of alphabetical letters. Before Arabic numerals came into usage (6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century AD), letters of the alphabet served as numbers, and thus words and names had a numerical equivalent. The most well-known NT example is the numerical equivalent of Nero in Latin, which is 666 (N = 50; E = 6; R = 500; O = 60; N = 50), cf. Rv. 13:18.*

<sup>3</sup> From the beginning of the genealogy, Matthew has used the aorist, active form (= to father, beget), but when he comes to Mary, he shifts to the aorist passive form *ex hes egennethe Iesous* (= out of whom was fathered Jesus), thus leaving the father unnamed. This ambiguity cries out for clarification, and Matthew will provide it in the succeeding story of Jesus' birth.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth pointing out that the relative pronoun *hes* (of whom) is feminine and cannot refer to Joseph.

<sup>5</sup> The Hebrew name "David" (דָּוִד = 4 + 6 + 4) is fourteen, and if this hypothesis is correct, then the genealogy gives a triple emphasis that Jesus was from the family of David.

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The three sets are suggestive in yet another way. To Abraham was given the first covenant, which promised Israel a special role in the purposes of God to bring blessing to all the families of the earth (Ge. 12:1-3). To David, also, was given a covenantal promise that his throne would endure forever (2 Sa. 7:16). In the exile, both the promises to Abraham and David were jeopardized, because the nation lost its land and Davidic king. Matthew now structures Jesus' genealogy in a way suggesting that this latter period of jeopardy is now over. In the birth of Jesus, God had acted to fulfill his ancient covenant promises to Abraham and David.

Above all are the highly suggestive titles "son of David" and "son of Abraham." The significance of the latter is obvious, for it places Jesus squarely in the nation of Israel as the seed to whom the promises were originally made. The term "son of David" had become a virtual synonym for messiah by the time of Jesus, based on Yahweh's promise to David that his throne would be established forever (2 Sa. 7:16). The OT prophets kept this theme alive (Is. 9:6-7; Je. 30:9; 33:15; Eze. 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Ho. 3:5), and it was repeated in the intertestamental literature as well (cf. Sirach 47:2, 11, 22; 1 Maccabees 2:57; Psalms of Solomon 17:4, 21-44). Later, in the apostolic era, the descent of Jesus from David became a way of expressing his messiahship and was explained as part of the good news that God had fulfilled his messianic promises (Ac. 13:22-23; Ro. 1:3; 2 Ti. 2:8; Re. 5:5; 22:16).

There is yet another striking feature of Matthew's genealogy which must not be passed over: the listing of the four women in addition to Mary herself. The appearance of a woman in a Jewish genealogy was not unprecedented, but it was rare, found usually in those cases where there was an irregularity of descent or where there was something significant about the woman's name. Hence, that Matthew includes four women is unusual, but that he includes these particular four women demonstrates an intentionality that would not have been missed by those familiar with the Jewish culture in the ancient world.

All four were likely gentiles. **Tamar**, the daughter-in-law of Judah, was probably Canaanite, like her mother-in-law (Ge. 38:2, 6). **Rahab** was a native of Canaanite Jericho (Jos. 2:1). **Ruth** was a Moabitess (Ru. 1:4). **Bathsheba** was the wife of a Hittite (2 Sa. 11:3), and while there is no direct information regarding her ethnicity, Matthew never calls her by name but emphasizes her gentile connection by calling her "Uriah's wife." This non-Jewish character of the four women seems to fit into Matthew's larger theological scheme that the message about Jesus would be international. Indeed, Matthew will close his gospel with a commission for universal proclamation (Mt. 28:19).

The other striking feature about these women is that, like Mary, there was some irregularity in the procreation of their offspring. Tamar, because she was deprived of her levirate rights, seduced her father-in-law, Judah, by posing as a cult prostitute, and through this method she gave birth to Perez and Zerah (Ge. 38:6-30). Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho (Jos. 2:1), and though there is no OT information regarding her as the mother of Boaz, Matthew apparently gleaned this information from some unknown source. Ruth was descended from a nation which had its roots in incest (Ge. 19:30-37), and her child Obed was born out of a levirate marriage (Ru. 2:20; 3:2, 9, 13; 4:9-13). Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, was seduced by David, who arranged to have her husband killed (2 Sa. 11:2-27). All four of these women found themselves outside the normal patriarchal structures of ancient society, and all four were restored or brought under the protection of God's providential care. The mention of these four women seems designed to suggest to the reader that Mary, the fifth woman in the story, would also suffer alienation from society but would come under the protection of God in giving birth to her child under unusual circumstances.