THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS

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An old problem for expositors has been the apparently contradictory genealogies of Christ given in Matthew and Luke. Matthew traces Jesus' lineage through forty-two generations from Abraham to Christ. Luke traces it from Adam to Christ for more than seventy generations.

It is unnecessary to examine in detail the genealogy between Adam and Abraham in Luke. That genealogy appears to derive from the Old Testament (1 Chr 1:1-4, 24-27; Gen 5:3-32; 11:10-26). Matthew gives no listing from Adam to Abraham, so no problems arise there. Both Matthew and Luke list the people from Abraham to David, but again there is no problem. The two genealogies are nearly identical at that point.

The problem that has confounded readers of the NT is found in the listing of names between David and Joseph. Matthew traces Joseph's line through Solomon and the successive kings of Judah. Luke, however, gives a completely different account, tracing Joseph's line through Nathan, Solomon's brother:

Matthew's Genealogy

Luke's Genealogy

David	Eliud	David	Zerubbabel
Solomon	Eleazar	Nathan	$\mathbf{R}\mathbf{hesa}$
Rehoboam	Matthan	Mattatha	Joanan
Abijah	Jacob	Menna	Joda
Asa	Joseph	Melea	\mathbf{Josech}
Jehoshaphat	Jesus	Eliakim	Semein
Joram		Jonam	Mattathias
Uzziah		Joseph	Maath
Jotham		Judah	Naggai
Ahaz		Simeon	Esli
Hezekiah		Levi	Nahum
Manasseh		Matthat	Amos
Amon		Jorim	Mattathias
Josiah		Eliezer	Joseph
Jeconiah		Joshua	Jannai
Shealtiel		Er	Melki
Zerubbabel		Elmadam	Levi
Abiud		Cosam	Matthat
Eliakim		Addi	Heli
Azor		Melki	${f Joseph}$
Zadok		Neri	Jesus
Akim		Shealtiel	

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Clearly there is a difference between these two genealogies. They both start with David and they both end with Jesus, but the names in between are completely different. There are not even the same number of names in the two lists. As Matthew Henry wrote: "The difference between the two evangelists in the genealogy of Christ has been a stumbling block to infidels that cavil at the word." Skeptics have looked at these differences and have arrived at a simple solution to the problem: The genealogies are, in essence, pious fiction. They are not really genealogies of Christ but have been composed, perhaps from other sources, so as to try to legitimize Jesus' claim to Messiahship. This explanation has been generally accepted outside of evangelical circles, but as an explanation it does not satisfy those with a high view of Scriptural integrity. But if the two lists are not mere invention, how can they be reconciled? They do not even agree on Joseph's father, a fact that should not have been much of a mystery.

Since first proposed by Annius of Viterbo (c. A.D. 1490),³ the most common explanation for the discrepancy—at least among evangelicals—has been to assume that Matthew's genealogy traces the lineage of Jesus through Joseph while the one in Luke traces it through Mary.⁴ At first thought this seems an admirable explanation.⁵ After all, everyone has two parents and therefore two genealogies. Jesus would be no different.⁶ This explanation is nothing but wishful thinking, however, as any comparison of the texts involved can demonstrate. Matt 1:15b-16a speaks of "Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph," whereas Luke 3:23b says, "He [Jesus] was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat."

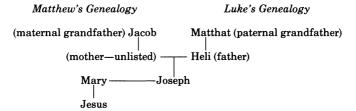
The attempted explanation by proponents of the matrilinear view—if they attempt to explain it—is that Luke 3:23b should be understood as follows: "He was the son—so it was thought of Joseph—the son of Heli, the son of Matthat." Heli is then Christ's grandfather, and Mary is simply unmentioned. But the Greek is stretched almost beyond what is possible; the reading is very unnatural and forced. It is clear from the text that both genealogies claim to be genealogies of Christ through Joseph.

- ¹M. Henry, An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments (Philadelphia: Towar and Hogan, 1828), 5. 482.
- ²J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1981) 499-500; M. Arnheim, *Is Christianity True?* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1984) 13-16.
- ³I. H. Marshall, The Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 158.
- ⁴A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (New York: Harper, 1950) 261–262, lists eleven scholars, among whom is Martin Luther, who accepted this explanation.
- ⁵Among recent proponents of the theory note R. Gundry, A Survey of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) 118-119; J. MacArthur, Jr., Matthew 1-7 (Chicago: Moody, 1985) 3; G. L. Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 316.
- ⁶See also C. Ryrie, Ryrie Study Bible, notes on Luke 3:23; Matt 1:1; New Scofield Reference Bible, note on Luke 3:23; cf. note on Matt 1:1.
- Notice the rather quick dismissal of the position by J. G. Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Harper, 1930) 203-204; see also Marshall, *Gospel* 158.

According to I. Howard Marshall, Julius Africanus utilized the custom of levirate marriage as described in Deut 25:5-6 (see also Gen 38:8-10 and the book of Ruth) to explain the apparent discrepancy in the genealogies. The proponents of this explanation argue that Matthan in Matt 1:15 (Joseph's grandfather) and Matthat in Luke 3:24 (his grandfather there as well) are one and the same man. It is then further supposed that Jacob—Joseph's "father" in Matthew—died without children, and that his nephew, the son of Heli (Joseph's father in Luke), became his heir.

A view akin to the above is that of Lord A. Hervey, which Marshall argues "has gained [the] most support in modern times." ¹¹ Machen argues quite forcefully for Hervey's idea. ¹² Hervey argued that Matthew gives the legal line of descent from David, giving the legal heir of the throne in each case. Luke on the other hand gives David's actual, physical descendants. Marshall writes that this "solution depends upon conjecture, and there is no way of knowing whether the conjectures correspond to reality." ¹³ It should also be noted that the position is rather complicated and requires an odd understanding of "begot."

I believe that such complicated methods of figuring out the relationship between the two genealogies are unnecessary. A simple explanation is readily available, one that involves neither strange customs nor textual twists. Both genealogies are clearly through Joseph. I propose that one traces the lineage back through Joseph's father, and that the other traces back through Joseph's mother. The maternal genealogy, however, drops the name of Joseph's mother and instead skips back to her father. Which is which? I believe that the genealogy in Luke is through Joseph's father and that the one in Matthew is through Joseph's maternal grandfather.



That Matthew should skip Joseph's mother in the genealogical listing is not peculiar since it is readily apparent that Matthew skips a number of people in his genealogy. For instance in Matt 1:8 he writes: "Joram the father

⁸Marshall, Gospel 158; see also A. T. Robertson, Harmony 261.

⁹As cited in Eusebius Hist. eccl. 1.7.2-15.

¹⁰See also Fitzmyer, Gospel 499-500. Robertson, Harmony, lists nine proponents of this view.

¹¹ Marshall, Gospel 158.

¹²Machen, Virgin Birth 202-209, 229-232.

¹³ Marshall, Gospel 159.

of Uzziah." But when his statement is compared with 1 Chr 3:10-12, it is evident that three people have been left out of Matthew's genealogy: Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah. Matthew left names out in order to arrive at the structural symmetry he desired: "Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to Christ" (Matt 1:17).

Therefore it would not be unreasonable to suppose that Matthew might leave out the name of Joseph's mother so that he could get the structural format he needed. Furthermore, his genealogy lists four women—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba—a fact that lends support to the idea that it might be a woman's genealogy.

This explanation for the two genealogies has the advantage of simplicity and also the textual support that the other common theories lack.