

Two Genealogies, Two Lineages

What do Christians do with the two different genealogies of Jesus? We must keep in mind that Mary was a virgin and that the angel told her that God, through His holy spirit, would miraculously make her pregnant. (It would be a miracle because she was a virgin! Just like Adam's beginning was a miracle because he didn't have "seeds" or DNA from two parents. At least Jesus had DNA from one, his mother, so he truly was the son of David. Both Adam and Jesus were totally human; but they were created miraculously by God.)

The following explanation is taken from: *Solving Bible Mysteries: Unraveling the Perplexing and Troubling Passages of Scripture*, D. James Kennedy. I think it gives good understanding and insight to the age old question.

"Now let's consider the problems that accompany these two genealogies in Matthew and Luke. There are differences in the names included in these genealogies, yet they seem to be in both cases the genealogies of Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus. Many have wrestled with these problems and tried to solve them. The solution, however, is actually very simple when you have the key: Matthew lists the genealogy of Joseph, while Luke gives the genealogy of Mary.

Incidentally, it is important to understand that the Jews did not normally include the names of women in their genealogies—yet the genealogy in Matthew names four women: Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba (all of whom have stories marred by immorality), plus Ruth, a Gentile. By including the names of these women, God shows us that, by the grace of Jesus Christ, He receives sinners and aliens who were once estranged from the covenant, and He elevates and ennobles the status of women, who were treated as chattel and inferiors in the ancient Middle Eastern cultures.

Now let's solve the mystery of the differing genealogies. First, consider Matthew 1:16: "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." Here Matthew uses a periphrasis, a turning of words. The point I would have you notice is: Who is the father of Joseph? Matthew's answer: The father of Joseph is Jacob.

Next, consider Luke 3:23: “And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli [or Eli].” Here we are told that Joseph is the son of Eli. Unless Joseph had two different fathers, then one of these genealogies cannot be the genealogy of Joseph. What is the solution to this mystery?

Bible scholars will tell you that it is not uncommon in ancient Jewish genealogies, when the lineage of the grandfather passed to a grandson through a daughter, that the name of the daughter was omitted and the daughter's husband was counted as the son of the grandfather. So we see that Jacob was the father of Joseph, who was the legal father (in actuality, the stepfather) of Jesus. Eli was the father of Mary, who was the genetic mother of Jesus. But Joseph is counted as the son of both Jacob and Eli in these two genealogies. In one case, he was the son; in the other case, he was the son-in-law.

Some critics and skeptics have claimed that the Bible does not use language this way, but in Ruth 1, Naomi refers to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, as “my daughter.” And in 1 Samuel 24, Saul refers to David, his son-in-law (through marriage to Saul's daughter Michal), as “my son, David.” This was a common custom of the Jews.

So it is clear that Matthew gives the genealogy of Joseph, and Luke gives the genealogy of Mary. This should not be interpreted as strange, because it is very clear in the first two chapters of Matthew that Matthew is giving Joseph's story. In fact, he refers to Joseph twenty-eight times. In the first two chapters of Luke, Luke makes scores of references to Mary, including the complete text of Mary's song. So it is only natural that he would give the genealogy of Mary.

Furthermore, if we had two genealogies of Joseph, who was not the genetic father of Jesus but merely the legal father, wouldn't it be strange that his genetic parentage would not be listed for us at all? In fact, as McClintock and Strong note in their *Biblical Encyclopedia* (published in the late 1800s), the Jews called Mary in Hebrew *Bath Heli*, which means “daughter of Eli.” She was indeed the daughter of Eli; and Joseph, her husband, was counted as his son. So the mystery is resolved simply and beautifully in Scripture.

And there is yet more proof that the genealogy in Luke describes the lineage of Mary, not Joseph. In Matthew 1:12, the genealogy of Joseph, we find this statement: “And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel.” Who is Jechonias (or Jechoniah)? He was a wicked king described in Jeremiah 22. There he is called Coniah (the name Jechoniah or Je-Coniah is simply a version of his name with the Je- prefix appended, which refers to Jehovah). In Jeremiah 22:30, God prophesies that none of Jechoniah's descendants will prosper on the throne of David. Yet, it is through David, his son Solomon, and that royal line (which goes down to Jechoniah) that the Messiah must come!

This would seem to be an unsolvable mystery—if the Messiah's lineage were traced only through Joseph, then the Messiah would be a descendant of Jechoniah, which would violate the prophecy of Jeremiah 22:30. But God had an ingenious plan for unlocking this mystery that no human mind could have foreseen. One branch of the line of David does indeed cut off at Jechoniah—but another branch descends in another direction, through Nathan, by passing wicked Jechoniah, and coming down through Mary. In this way, the prophecy against Jechoniah is fulfilled. The biological lineage of Jesus does not come through that evil king, but through the Virgin Mary.”