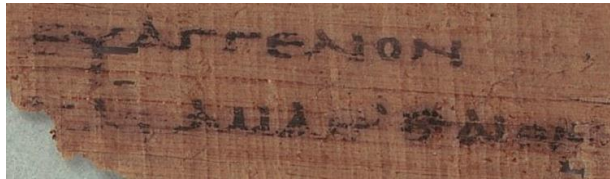


January 5 Lesson

Today we read the genealogies of Jesus. Yesterday, we rejoiced with Zechariah and Elizabeth over the birth of their son John (the Baptist), and now we're ready to focus on the birth of Jesus. So far this year, we've only read passages from Luke and John, but today we read the beginning of the gospel of Matthew. Just like Luke and John, Matthew doesn't say who the author is, so we'll look at the internal (within the text) and external (outside the text) evidence to establish authorship.

We'll start with the external evidence, beginning with the title of the book, which was added by ancient scribes to identify the author. The earliest manuscripts all attribute the gospel to Matthew.¹



Further, the unanimous witness of the church fathers (e.g., Papias, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Origen) is that the apostle Matthew was the author.² Papias' testimony is especially significant because he claims to have received his information directly from those who had talked with Jesus' closest disciples, including Matthew.³

As far as internal evidence goes, what little we have is not specific enough to determine authorship, but it is compatible with and supportive of Matthew as the author. For example, in the account of the call of Matthew, both Mark and Luke call him "Levi" (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). Only the gospel of Matthew tells us that Levi was also called "Matthew" (Matt 9:9). "Matthew," a Hebrew name meaning "gift of Yahweh" (*Mattiyahu*) was evidently the apostolic name Jesus gave him, similar to how Jesus called Simon by the name Peter. Thus we conclude that Matthew is indeed the author of the gospel which bears his name.

So what was Matthew's purpose in writing his gospel? Well, we find the answer in the very first verse: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1). Wow, think about that...that's the history of Israel in three names: Jesus, David and Abraham. A mini-genealogy to set the stage before the main genealogy. So let's look at what Matthew is telling us in this verse.

First, the word 'genealogy' roots Jesus in history. Matthew's gospel doesn't begin "once upon a time." Jesus isn't part of a fairytale—he's a flesh and blood human being in space and time.⁴

Second, the word 'Christ' declares Jesus to be the Messiah. 'Christ' is the Greek word for 'Anointed One,' while 'Messiah' is the Hebrew word for 'Anointed One.' Thus Christ = Messiah = Anointed One. This title invokes Psalm 2, where the Messiah (the 'Anointed One') is revealed to be the Son of God as well as King of the nations (Ps 2:6-7).

Third, the phrase 'son of David' tells us that Jesus is a descendant of king David and thus qualified to be king of the Jews. This invokes the Davidic Covenant recorded in 2 Samuel 7 in which God promises that a son of David would sit on the throne of Israel forever (2 Sam 7:12-16; cf. Luke 1:32; Acts 13:22-23).

¹ See Ⲙ⁴ *evangelion kata Maththaion* as the earliest known example; also Vaticanus, Bezae and Washingtonianus.

² Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 33.

³ Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 224-225.

⁴ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/tim-keller-wants-you-to-stop-underestimating-christmas/>.

Fourth, the phrase ‘son of Abraham’ tells us that Jesus is a descendant of the father of the Jews, the great patriarch Abraham. This invokes the Abrahamic Covenant recorded in Genesis in which God promises that the world would be blessed in Abraham (Gen 12:3; 22:18). Matthew will go on to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise—he is the promised ‘seed’ or ‘offspring’ of Abraham who would bless the world by turning them from their sins (Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:16).

Ok, let’s take a closer look at the genealogy that Matthew records. And as we begin, you might wonder why genealogical records were important to Israel. There were five main reasons: (1) nationality, (2) land, (3) priesthood, (4) kingship and (5) promise. First, the nation of Israel was made up of the descendants of Jacob’s sons, so you had to prove your ancestry in order to be considered part of the nation. Second, the land of Israel had been allotted to the people on the basis of tribal descent, so you had to prove your ancestry in order to have ownership of land within the nation (Num 26:52–56; 36:7–9; Josh 13–19). Third, the priesthood of Israel was reserved for the descendants of Aaron and religious service related to the tabernacle/temple was reserved for the Levites, so you had to prove your ancestry in order to be allowed to serve (cf. Ezra 2:61–63; Neh 7:63–65). Fourth, the throne of Israel was reserved for the descendants of the king, specifically the descendants of king David, so you had to prove your ancestry in order to make a claim to the throne. Fifth, the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants involved God’s promise concerning the descendants of these two men, so ancestry had to be proved in order to show that God fulfilled his word.

Now, Matthew’s genealogy begins with Abraham and works forward toward Jesus. This echoes Chronicles, the last book in the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), and emphasizes the fact that *Jesus is the culmination of the history of Israel*. Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s plan to save his people through the Messiah (Gen 12:2–3; Isa 53) and God’s promise that David’s throne would be established forever (2 Sam 7:16). Matthew arranges his genealogy into three groups of 14 “generations” (Matt 1:17), each representing a major period of Israel’s history: Abraham-to-David (1127 yrs), David-to-the-Exile (452 yrs), and the Exile-to-Jesus (585 yrs).⁵ Each name in the genealogy represents a generation, with David being counted twice, once in the first set and once in the second (as specified in v. 17).⁶

| Group 1 | Group 2 | | Group 3 |
|-------------|---------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| 1 Abraham | 1 David | EXILE deportation to Babylon | 1 Jeconiah |
| 2 Isaac | 2 Solomon | | 2 Shealtiel |
| 3 Jacob | 3 Rehoboam | | 3 Zerubbabel |
| 4 Judah | 4 Abijah | | 4 Abiud |
| 5 Perez | 5 Asa | | 5 Eliakim |
| 6 Hezron | 6 Jehoshaphat | | 6 Azor |
| 7 Ram | 7 Jehoram | | 7 Zadok |
| 8 Amminadab | 8 Uzziah | | 8 Akim |
| 9 Nahshon | 9 Jotham | | 9 Eliud |
| 10 Salmon | 10 Ahaz | | 10 Eleazar |
| 11 Boaz | 11 Hezekiah | | 11 Matthan |
| 12 Obed | 12 Manasseh | | 12 Jacob |
| 13 Jesse | 13 Amon | | 13 Joseph |
| 14 David | 14 Josiah | | 14 Jesus |

Many scholars theorize that Matthew worked in sets of 14 because the consonants that make up the name David sum to 14: (*dwd* in Hebrew where *d* = 4, *w* = 6, so 4 + 6 + 4 = 14).⁷

⁵ “By portraying Jesus both as a son of David through Joseph and as virginally conceived, Matthew and Luke suggest that Joseph adopted Jesus into the Davidic line. Most modern interpreters assume that Joseph adopted Jesus through some Jewish law or custom.” Caleb T. Friedeman, “Jesus’ Davidic Lineage and the Case for Jewish Adoption,” *NTS* 66 (2020) 249–267.

⁶ Stephen C. Carlson, “The Davidic Key for Counting the Generations in Matthew 1:17,” *CBQ* 76.4 (2014) 665–683.

⁷ In the ancient world, letters served not only as the building blocks of words but also as symbols of numbers. Hence any word had a numerical value. The use of such symbolism is known as gematria. In Hebrew, “David” is *dāwid*; and *d* = 4, *w* = 6 (the vowels, a later addition to the text, don’t count). Therefore “David” = *dwd* = 4 + 6 + 4 = 14. (This would not work in the Dead Sea Scrolls, where, with one exception [CD 7:16], the consonantal spelling of “David” is *dwyd*.) D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew–Mark (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 95.

Now, I want you to notice what happens after Group 2. Matthew is listing all these names and then suddenly, he mentions an event, ‘the deportation to Babylon’ (Matt 1:11–12, 17). It’s the only event that Matthew includes, and it interrupts the flow of the genealogy. What is Matthew doing here? Well, he’s deliberately structuring his genealogy to remind us that the deportation to Babylon was a massive disruption in the history of Israel. And even though the Jews eventually returned from captivity, the throne of Israel remained empty—there was no Davidic king! Look at Group 3 compared to Group 2. Group 2 is kings from top and bottom; Group 3 begins with king Jeconiah (or Jehoiachin), who was also deported to Babylon, and then the rest of the names...no king. Group 3 is a family line marked by the Exile.

That’s what Matthew wants us to appreciate. He wants to remind us that the Exile had thrown the kingdom into chaos, there was no Davidic king on the throne, and the people of Israel were waiting for God’s promises to be fulfilled. So when we come to the last name in the genealogy, we see that the kingdom that began with David and was lost at the Exile is now restored with the coming of Jesus, the Davidic Messiah.⁸

Now, we can’t leave Matthew without some discussion of the women he included in his genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah’s wife (Bathsheba). This is truly surprising, shocking even. I mean Tamar and Bathsheba aren’t exactly shining jewels on the family tree! So why did Matthew include these women in a genealogy intended to showcase the Davidic lineage of Jesus the Messiah? Why choose these women when he could have mentioned people like Sarah or Rebekah or Leah?

Well, let’s discuss these women and see if we can figure out what Matthew was doing. We’ll start with Tamar. As best we can tell, Tamar was a Canaanite (Judah married a Canaanite and so when he took a wife for his son Er from the same region, it makes sense to think that she was also a Canaanite; Gen 38). Tamar committed incest with her father-in-law Judah in order to have children, and one of them, Perez, was an ancestor of Jesus. OK, not off to a good start. Next, we have Rahab. Rahab was a Canaanite from Jericho who earned her living as a prostitute. However, she was saved from destruction because of her faith, and she ended up living out her life with the Israelites (Joshua 6:25). So far, two Gentiles, two outsiders; yet in the case of Rahab, she left her people and her gods and joined the people of Israel.

Next, Ruth. Ruth was a Moabite, a Gentile, but like Rahab, she also left her people and her gods and pledged allegiance to Naomi’s people and Naomi’s God. Indeed, the Jews considered her to be a righteous woman. Last, the wife of Uriah, Bathsheba. Bathsheba, as far as we can tell, was a Jew (her father was Eliam, who was likely the son of David’s advisor, Ahithophel; 2 Sam 11:3; 23:34). Yet she married Uriah the Hittite, and David committed adultery with her.

OK, so how do these women serve Matthew’s purpose in the genealogy? Well, for one thing, they show that God is merciful and forgiving, even to Canaanites who were marked for death (Deut 7:1–6). For another, they show that foreigners and Gentiles were included in the people of God. I think Grant Osborne sums it up well when he says, “God in his providence saw fit to include women who were foreigners and sinners in the royal lineage of Jesus so as to show that he is God not only of righteous Jews but of all humanity and that he has come to bring salvation to the whole world of humanity.”⁹

We come now to Luke’s genealogy. Remember that Luke is writing to Theophilus, a wealthy and influential Gentile convert, and so Luke emphasizes the humanity of Jesus. Thus it’s no surprise when Luke traces Jesus’ genealogy all the way back to Adam, showing in a list of 77 names that Jesus is indeed part of the human race. But Luke doesn’t stop there; he concludes by saying that Jesus is “the son of Adam, the son of God” (Luke 3:38). No other genealogy does this. No other genealogy goes all the way back to God as creator. Why does Luke do this? I think Luke is reminding us that Adam was created good

⁸ Nicholas G. Piotrowski, “After the Deportation’: Observations in Matthew’s Apocalyptic Genealogy,” BBR 25.2 (2015) 189–203.

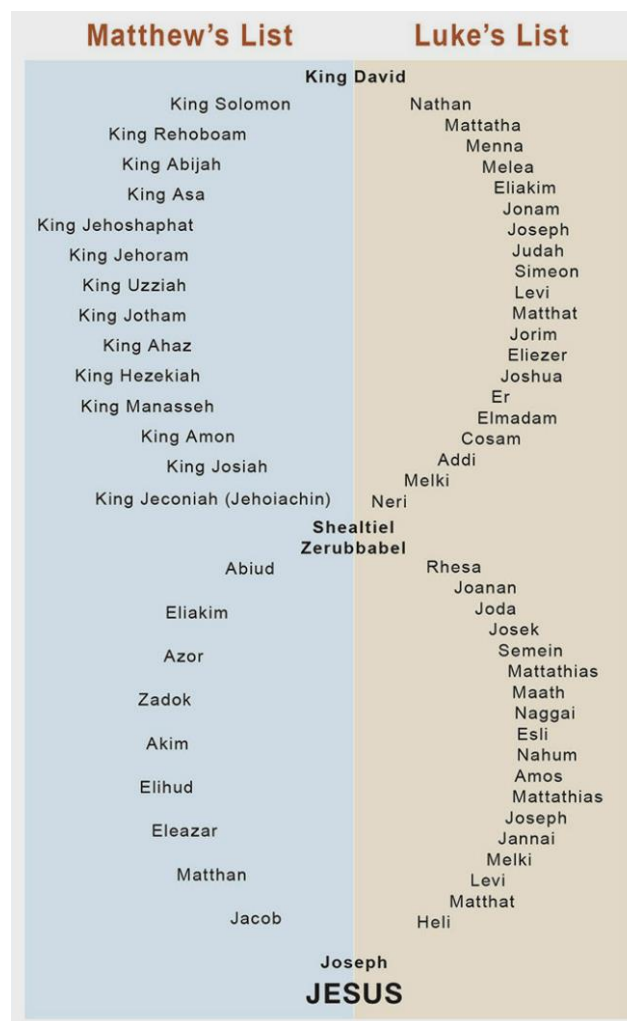
⁹ Osborne, *Matthew*, 63–64.

and holy and in loving relationship with God. Yet Adam fell into sin—he turned away from God, yielded himself to Satan, and became a slave and son of the devil. Adam died, spiritually and physically, and “in Adam all die” (1 Cor 15:22), that is, Adam’s death passed to all of us (Rom 5:12).

But it did not pass to Jesus! Jesus was born of a virgin, and though he took on a human nature like us, he is not tainted by Adam’s sin. Jesus is what Adam once was. Jesus is man as God meant man to be. Jesus is the second Adam (1 Cor 15:45–47), the son of God who triumphed over Satan and restored mankind to its rightful place in God’s family. With respect to his divine nature, Jesus is the Son of God, God-of-very-God, one with the Father and the Spirit. With respect to his human nature, Jesus is the son of God, holy and sinless, the second Adam, the life-giving spirit, and in him, we also become sons of God.

Luke begins his genealogy of Jesus by saying, “Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph...” (Luke 3:23). Notice the phrase, “(as was supposed).” This is Luke’s way of reminding us that Jesus is not Joseph’s biological son. Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, and so *his relationship to Joseph is legal, not biological*. In those days, a son’s legal status depended on the father, and since Joseph took Jesus as his own son, Joseph’s ancestry becomes Jesus’ ancestry.

Luke also says that “Jesus was...the son...of Joseph, the son of Heli....” This is a bit confusing, since Matthew says that Joseph was the son of Jacob (Matt 1:16). In fact, when we compare the two genealogies, we immediately notice how different they are:

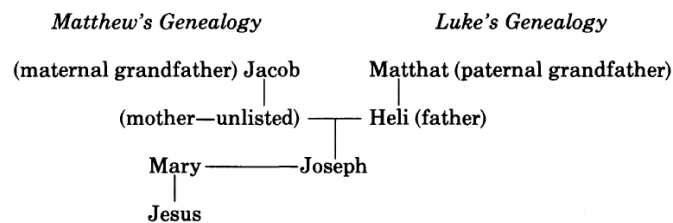


Between David–Shealtiel and between Zerubbabel–Joseph, Matthew and Luke give completely different names. What’s going on here?

Well, some scholars think that *Matthew traces Jesus' lineage through Joseph, while Luke traces Jesus' lineage through Mary*.¹⁰ The two variations of this view are: (1) Heli had no son, only a daughter Mary, and when Mary married Joseph, Heli took Joseph as his son and heir, and (2) Joseph is mentioned in the genealogy only parenthetically and the verse should read, "Jesus...being the son (as was supposed of Joseph) of Heli..." (Luke 3:23).¹¹

Other scholars think that *one genealogy is legal while the other is biological*.¹² When you think of a family tree, you normally think of it as being biological, that is, showing the physical ancestors of an individual. But it can also show the legal ancestors as well. This can be through adoption (in which a man becomes the legal heir of someone who is not his biological father) or, for Israel, Levirate marriage (in which a man dies childless and his brother marries the wife in order to raise up a child in his brother's name; cf. Gen 38:6–8; Deut 25:5–6). So, for example, Matthew could be listing the legal descendants of David—those who were heir to the Davidic throne from a legal standpoint—while Luke could be listing the biological descendants of David. Or vice versa.

Still other scholars think that *one genealogy is paternal while the other is maternal*.¹³ Family trees can show lineage through a person's father or through a person's mother. Jacob in Matthew's genealogy could be the maternal grandfather of Jesus (Joseph's father-in-law) while Heli in Luke's genealogy could be the paternal grandfather of Jesus (Joseph's biological father). This is a viable option since Matthew's list includes women and skips various generations in order to create three groups of 14.



So who's right? Which one is it? Unfortunately, we don't have enough information to know for sure which of these possibilities is the answer (it might even be a combination of them). But we do have *reasonable explanations* for the differences, and so this is not a case of finding an error in God's Word. Indeed, God deliberately gave us two different genealogies of Jesus in order to highlight different aspects of his nature and character.

OK, let's sum up what we've learned today. Matthew's genealogy is designed to showcase Jesus as the Messiah, the king of the Jews and the seed of Abraham in whom the world would be blessed (Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:16). Jesus is the culmination of Israel's history. He is the fulfillment of God's plan to save his people through the Messiah and God's promise that David's throne would be established forever. The damage inflicted on the kingship by the Exile is healed in Jesus, and he is the answer to the hopes and prayers of the people of Israel.

Luke's genealogy is designed to showcase Jesus as the son of God, the second Adam, man as man was meant to be—holy and sinless and in right relationship with the Father. In tracing Jesus' lineage past Abraham to Adam and ultimately to God, Luke shows us that Jesus is not only descended from the father of the Jews, but also from the father of all mankind. He is truly one of us, experiencing the human condition with all its flaws and imperfections. Yet he is also the One who will save his people and the world from their sins.

¹⁰ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 11, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 222–24.

¹¹ Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 316–317.

¹² Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:50*, 918–920.

¹³ R. P. Nettelhorst, "The Genealogy of Jesus," *JETS* 31.2 (1988) 169–172.