Harmony Of The Gospels

Lesson #3
The Genealogies Of Matthew And Luke
Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38

I. *General Observations*

A. Both Matthew and Luke recognize the importance of establishing a genealogy for Jesus, in accordance with the care given such matters in ancient Israel. Genealogies were the key to identity and legitimacy. The right to hold offices (priests, kings, etc.) was a hereditary privilege. There are ten genealogical lists in Genesis alone, not to mention 1 Chronicles 1-9, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

B. In their handling of Jesus' genealogy, Matthew and Luke differ in several ways.

1. Matthew begins his gospel with the genealogy, thereby establishing an immediate connection with the Old Testament and with Israel. Luke waits until the significant part of the ministry of John the Baptist is completed and Jesus stands alone as the designated Son of God.

2. Matthew begins with Abraham and goes in descending order while Luke proceeds in ascending order. Matthew groups his names symmetrically; Luke simply lists them.

3. Both trace the lineage back through ancestral lines that diverge for a number of generations from each other, though both meet at the generation of David.

4. Matthew includes the names of several women (a feature one might have expected in Luke).

C. Matthew's chief aim in including the genealogy is hinted at in the first verse -- namely, to show that Jesus is truly in the kingly line of David, heir to the Messianic promises, the one who brings divine blessings to all nations. Therefore the genealogy focuses on King David (1:6) on the one hand, yet on the other hand includes Gentile women.

1. Matthew begins with Abraham, the "father" of the Jewish nation, then follows the line through King David. Each individual that Matthew lists is of royal lineage. This gives evidence of the royal blood line of Jesus.

2. Matthew and Luke show that Joseph was a legal parent, but not a biological parent to Jesus. Jesus was miraculously conceived in Mary through the Holy Spirit.

   a) By virtue of being Mary's husband, Joseph was considered the father of Jesus. During first century times, if a Jewish man adopted a son, that son received the father's lineage.

b) Therefore, according to Jewish tradition, Jesus would be given the genealogy of Joseph. This allowed Jesus to legitimately claim the throne of David.

3. Interestingly, the Jewish Talmud (a collection of rabbinical writings), charged Jesus with being born out of wedlock but it did not attack Joseph's or Mary's lineages. They were taken to be accurate.

D. The significance of the genealogy in Luke probably lies in the emphasis on Jesus as a member of the human race. He implicitly contrasts the obedient second Adam, the true Son of God, with the disobedient first Adam. Tracing Christ's lineage all the way back to Adam, Luke lets the Greeks know that Christ's sacrifice is for all of mankind, not simply for the Jews.

II. The Genealogy Of Matthew (Matthew 1:1-17)

A. Notice carefully the wording of vs. 16: "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." This stands in contrast to the format followed in the preceding verses of the succession of Joseph's ancestors: "Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob, etc." Joseph is not said to have begotten Jesus; rather he is referred to as "the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born."

B. The first words of Matthew may be translated as "a [coherent and unified] record of the origins of Jesus Christ," thus serving as an opening statement of the first two chapters.

C. The designation "Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham" resonates in the mind of the Jew. "Christ" is roughly the Greek equivalent to "Messiah" or "Anointed" (cf. 1 Samuel 2:10, 35; 10:1; 12:3-5; 16:13; 2 Samuel 5:3; 12:7).

1. In the first century, Palestine was full of Messianic expectation. Many Jews expected two different "Messiahs." But Matthew's linking of "Christ" and "son of David" leaves no doubt of what he is claiming for Jesus.

2. In the gospels "Christ" almost always appears as a title. But it was natural for Christians after the resurrection to use "Christ" as a name (e.g., "Jesus Christ"). Only in Matthew 1:1, 16, 18 can "Christ" be defended as designating a name as well as a title of Jesus.

D. "Son of David" is an important designation in Matthew. Not only does David become a turning point in the genealogy (1:6, 17), but the title occurs a total of 10 times in Matthew. By contrast, it only occurs three times in both Mark and Luke, and none in John, although the term "seed of David" is used in 7:42.

1. God swore His love to David (Psalm 89:29) and promised that one of his immediate descendants would establish the kingdom -- even

more, that David's kingdom and throne would endure forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

2. Isaiah foresaw that a "son" would be given, a son with the most extravagant titles who would reign on David's throne (Isaiah 9:6-7).

3. In Jesus' day at least some branches of Judaism understood "son of David" to be Messianic.

4. In the minds of the early Christians, the tree of David, hacked off so that only a stump remained, was sprouting a new branch (Isaiah 11:1).

E. Jesus is also the "son of Abraham." The covenant with the Jewish people had first been made with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 17:7; 22:18). More important, Genesis 22:18 had promised that through Abraham's offspring "all nations" would be blessed; so with this allusion to Abraham, Matthew is preparing his readers for the final words of this offspring from Abraham -- the commission to make disciples of "all nations" (28:19).

F. Of the 12 sons of Jacob, Judah is singled out, as his tribe bears the scepter (Genesis 49:10; cf. Hebrews 7:14). The words "and his brothers" indicate that the Christ emerges within the group of the Israelites (the twelve tribes of Israel).

G. Approximately 400 years (Genesis 15:13; Exodus 12:40) are covered by the four generations from Perez to Amminadab. Doubtless several names have been omitted: the Greek verb translated "begat" does not require immediate relationship but often means "was the ancestor of." Similarly, the line between Amminadab and David is short.

H. David's royal authority, lost at the exile, has now been regained and surpassed by "great David's greater son." David became the father of Solomon; but Solomon's mother "had been the wife of Uriah" (cf. 2 Samuel 11:27; 12:4). Bathsheba thus becomes the fourth woman to be mentioned in this genealogy.

1. Inclusion of these four women in the Messiah's genealogy instead of an all-male listing, especially with the exclusion of names of such great matriarchs as Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah, shows that Matthew is conveying more than merely genealogical data.

2. Tamar enticed her father-in-law into an incestuous relationship (Genesis 38). The prostitute Rahab saved the spies and joined the Israelites (Joshua 2, 5; cf. Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). Bathsheba was taken into an adulterous union with David, who committed murder to cover it up.

3. Several reasons have been suggested to explain the inclusion of these women, all of which are valid.

a) Some have pointed out that at least three were Gentiles. This goes well with the reference to Abraham; the Jewish Messiah ex-

tends His blessings beyond Israel, even as Gentiles are included in His line.

    b) Others have noted that three of the four were involved in gross sexual sin and that later in this same chapter Matthew introduces Jesus as the one who "will save his people from their sins" (1:21).

    c) A final reason is similar to the second. Matthew emphasized that on the human side Jesus' ancestry was a part of the world. He then turns to emphasize on the divine side that He was without sin.

I. There is no obvious pattern to the kings mentioned here: wicked Rehoboam was the father of wicked Abijah, the father of the good king Asa. Asa was the father of another good king, Jehoshaphat, who fathered the wicked king Joram. Good or evil, they were part of Messiah's line; for though grace does not run in the blood, God's providence cannot be deceived or outmaneuvered.

J. The exile to Babylon marked the end of the reign of David's line, a momentous event in Old Testament history. The final list of 14 begins with a further mention of the exile, and where we find one of our greatest difficulties. Matthew presents Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) as the father of Shealtiel who was the father of Zerubbabel (cf. Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2, Nehemiah 12:1; Haggai 1:1, 12, 14; 2:2, 2:23). Luke 3:27 presents Neri as the father of Shealtiel. Finally, 1 Chronicles 3:19 presents Jeconiah as the father of Pedaiah, a brother of Shealtiel.

    1. The simplest solution is if we do not admit that the Shealtiel and Zerubbabel occurring in Matthew's genealogy are identical with those in Luke's (3:27). If Shealtiel and Zerubbabel distinguished themselves at all among the descendants of Solomon, it is not unusual that about the same time two members of Nathan's descendants should be named after them.

    2. However, the proposal of a Levirate marriage also solves the difficulty. The widow of a childless man could marry his brother so that a child of the second marriage could legally be considered as the son of the deceased man in order to perpetuate his name (Genesis 38:8-9; Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Leviticus 25:25; Numbers 7:1-11; 36:1-12; Matthew 22:24).

        a) We have an example of a Levirate marriage in this genealogy with Obed, the son of Boaz. Boaz took Ruth, the childless widow of his kinsman Mahlon, son of Elimelech, to raise and begat Obed.

        b) In compliance with the law, Obed was the Levirate son and heir of the deceased Mahlon, and inherited the land of Elimelech, his grandfather (Ruth 1:1-5; 2:1; 3:12-13; 4:1-6, 9-11, 13, 17).

        (1) As regarding Luke, this means that Neri, who was descended from Nathan, Solomon's eldest brother (1 Chronicles 3:5) could have died without male descendants. The two branches of the family of David (Nathan and Solomon), were then both united in Zerubbabel by the marriage of Shealtiel (from Solomon) with the daughter of Neri (from Nathan).

        (2) As regarding 1 Chronicles, this means that Shealtiel would have died childless and Pedaiah, his brother, married the widow. Pedaiah probably observed the law quoted above, and as a result, Zerubbabel was born, thus preserving Shealtiel's name. In a genealogy the child could be listed under his natural or his legal father.

   K. The nine names from Abiud to Jacob are otherwise unknown to us today. The names in the first two-thirds of the genealogy are taken from the Septuagint (1 Chronicles 1-3, esp. 2:1-15; 3:5-24; cf. Ruth 4:12-22). After Zerubbabel, Matthew may have relied on extrabiblical sources of which we know nothing. In the New Testament era certain genealogical records were stored in a public archive in the temple mount, while others were maintained by private families. Josephus used public records as sources of some of his information.

   L. The wording in vs. 16 is precise. Joseph's royal line has been traced; Joseph is the husband of Mary; Mary is the mother of Jesus. The relationship between Joseph and Jesus has been so far unstated. But this peculiar form of expression cries out for the explanation provided in the ensuing verses. Legally and royally, Jesus stands in line to the throne of David; physically He is born of a woman "found with child of the Holy Ghost" (1:18).

   M. An obvious question surrounds the choice of three sets of fourteen. Why does Matthew arrange the names in this way? This division of the names in their genealogy was doubtless adopted for the purpose of aiding the memory. It was common among the Jews; and other similar instances are preserved. Also, the threefold list highlights two essential turning-points in the history of Israel, and of the Davidic line: the accession of David to kingship, and the loss of that kingship at the Babylonian exile. Now in the coming of Jesus, son of David, that kingship is to reach its appointed goal. The rounded symmetry of the scheme indicates that the period of preparation is now complete.

III. The Genealogy Of Luke (Luke 3:23-38)
   A. The age of Jesus is given in approximate terms.
     1. "Thirty" was the age of priests when they began their service (Numbers 4:3, 47), but it is not evident that Jesus had any reference to that in delaying His work to His thirtieth year.

2. This was also the age at which Joseph stood before Pharaoh (Genesis 41:46) and David began to reign (2 Samuel 5:4).
B. Luke 3:23-38 seems to record the genealogical line of Mary herself, carried all the way back beyond the time of Abraham to Adam and the commencement of the human race.
1. This is implied by the wording of vs. 23: "Jesus … being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph." This "as was supposed" indicates that Jesus was not really the biological son of Joseph, although this was commonly assumed by the public.
2. Origen, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Athanasius, and Justin Martyr all held to the view that Matthew traced Joseph's lineage, while Luke traced Mary's.
C. Perhaps the greatest objection against the genealogy is the alleged contradiction between Matthew and Luke as to the father of Joseph. Matthew states that Joseph was the son of Jacob, while Luke states that he was the son of Heli. There are at least two possible explanations for this problem.
1. The first solution involves the possibility of a Levirate marriage.
a) The Jerusalem Talmud indicates that Mary was the daughter of Heli (Haggigah, Book 77, 4). Mary's father (Heli) had two daughters, Mary and the unnamed wife of Zebedee (John 19:25; Matthew 27:56).
b) If there were no sons, Joseph would become the "son" of Heli on his marriage to preserve the family name and inheritance. So Joseph was the natural son of Jacob (descending from Solomon), and the legal son of Heli (descending from Nathan).
(1) Luke could rightfully call Joseph the "son of Heli" because this was in compliance with use of the word "son" at that time, even though the relationship was that of a son-in-law.
(2) This use of the word can be seen in the Old Testament with Saul frequently calling David his "son," even though he was his son-in-law (1 Samuel 24:16; 26:17, 21, 25).
(3) We are born with two genealogies, one from our father and the other from our mother. So if Luke traces through Mary, and Matthew through Joseph, then Christ will have two different genealogies.
2. The second solution involves the possibility that both Matthew and Luke record only Joseph's genealogy.
a) As an example of one way this would work would be that an unnamed woman married Matthan, a descendant of David through Solomon, and became the mother of Jacob; after Matthan's death she took for her second husband Matthat, a descendent of

David through Nathan, and by him became the mother of Heli. Jacob and Heli were, therefore, half brothers.

b) Heli married, but died without offspring; his widow, therefore, became the Levirate wife of Jacob, and gave birth to Joseph, who was the natural son of Jacob, but the legal son of Heli, thus combining in his person two lineages of David's descendants. Or alternately, it is possible that Jacob died without leaving any children of his own and thus his nephew, a son of his half brother Heli (i.e., Joseph), became his heir.

c) This would make Mary and Joseph first cousins. Only in the twentieth century did marriages between cousins become taboo.

    (1) The ancient Egyptians were so tied to keeping the royal blood line pure that Pharaoh could only marry his sister or at the least first cousin to produce a pure blood line to the throne.

    (2) Both Albert Einstein and Charles Darwin married their first cousins. In fact, 26 states allow first cousin marriages.

D. Although there are different ways these situations may be changed, the end result is the same. Considering the question of contradiction, it does not matter which of these is the true relationship. The appearance of contradiction is removed in either case and this lifts the genealogies above the reach of the weapons of unbelief.