

## Genealogy and Lineage in Israel

Preserving your lineage was paramount in Israel

Your tribe and lineage determined your place in society - Descendants of Levi were the only ones allowed to serve in the Temple. Priests could only be descendants of Aaron. A family's portion of inheritance in the land was to be kept distinct - every Jubilee Year it would be returned to the original owners. Careful genealogical records were preserved and updated in the Temple.

## Messiah

From **Genesis 3:15** people knew that the Deliverer, understood as the Messiah, would come through the "seed of the woman." This was contrary to patriarchal traditions. Lineage was usually traced through the father.

Tribal affiliations were registered through the father, but Jewishness was passed down through the mother. (Yevamot 97a-98a.)

In fact, the term "one born of woman" was to describe humans by angels in an imagined debate over God's plan to give the Torah to Moses (Midrash Tehillim 8 on **Psalm 8:4-5**).

The Messiah would be a son of Adam or "Son of Man," and therefore human. He would be a Jew, in the line of Abraham, but whose "seed" would also be a blessing to all the nations, and would come through the miraculous birth by Sarah of Abraham's son Isaac.

Also, Jews knew from Jacob's prophesy regarding his son Judah (**Genesis 49:10**) that "the scepter would not depart from Judah... until Shiloh comes."

**Genesis 49:10** - "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh ('he whose it is') come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be (or 'the obedience of the nations shall be his')."

The Jerusalem Targum gave the common interpretation: "Until the time that King Messiah shall come."

The Romans made the "scepter depart" by taking away for the first time the Sanhedrin's supreme power to administer the death penalty. That happened in about 7 A.D., twenty-three years before the trial of Christ.

Rabbi Nachmon says, "When the members of the Sanhedrin found themselves deprived of their right over life and death, a general consternation took possession of them; they covered their heads with ashes, and their bodies with sackcloth, exclaiming, 'Woe unto us, for the scepter has departed from Judah, and the Messiah has not come.'

" (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin, Chapter 4, fol. 37, recto)

Furthermore, Messiah would come through the line of David. He would be called "Son of David" and part of the royal lineage.

But there was a problem. Jeconiah, one of the last Davidic kings before the exile, was cursed by Jeremiah: "For no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David, or ruling again in Judah" (**Jeremiah 22:24-30**).

After the exile, there were only two tribes left - Judah and Benjamin. (with some traces of the other tribes, probably families who had fled the Assyrian invasion).

## Jesus

Matthew points out that Joseph's lineage includes Jeconiah, so any natural son of Joseph could not be Messiah. Then he relates Mary's miraculous virgin birth (see **Isaiah 7:14**). Her genealogy, described in **Luke 3**, shows her royal line comes down from David through a different ancestor than Jeconiah.

One rabbinical tradition says Messiah would have no father (although nothing is said about not having a mother, since he would have to be born in Bethlehem-Ephratha - **Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:1-6**):

Rabbi Mosheh had-Darshan of Narbonne, a rabbi of the 11th century, in his Bereshith Rabbah, repeatedly applies **Isaiah 52:13** through **Isaiah 53:12** to the Messiah: "I have learnt it from the words of R. Mosheh had-Darshan: The redeemer whom I shall raise up from among you will have no father, as it is written, 'Behold the man whose name is Zerah [branch], and he shall branch up out of his place' (Zech. vi. 12); and so Isaiah says, 'And he came up like a sucker,' etc."

[See <https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/issues-v05-n06/the-genealogy-of-the-messiah>]

When Jesus was born, Jews knew that the prophetic 70 weeks of Daniel were completed. Anticipation of the coming Messiah was high - Anna and Simeon are an example, waiting in the Temple for the "consolation of Israel."

But recognizing the Messiah was contingent on knowing and recording the genealogy of everyone.

In fact, Anna was of the tribe of Asher, one of the "lost" northern tribes, whose family may have fled the invasion and survived. Thus she served as a representative of those lost tribes, showing both Israel and Judah embracing the newborn Messiah.

That's why the laws about illegitimate marriages and sexual relations was paramount, beyond the obvious moral and social problems. They were there to safeguard the ability to verify and validate one's lineage, to know the Messiah when He arrived.