**Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-28**

**Comparing the Two Genealogies of Jesus**

Genealogies, like the “begats” in the Old Testament, don’t seem like a very rich source of spiritual instruction. But they can harbor unexpected insights into how God works His will over centuries.

First, however, it gets complicated.

The two genealogies of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke present a problem, because they don't seem to align.

Matthew and Luke both trace Jesus' ancestry back to David and ultimately Abraham. Matthew starts from Abraham and works his way down to Jesus. Meanwhile, Luke starts with Jesus and works his way back to Adam and then God.

The problem is when we put Matthew and Luke's genealogies side by side, the names don't match up

Why do the Gospels include a genealogy? Because it is vital for Jesus as Messiah to be linked back to the House of David.

In **2 Samuel 7:12–16,** God promised King David through the prophet Nathan that his descendant would build a house for God's name and that his throne and kingdom would be established forever.

**- 2 Samuel 7:16** - "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever."

The patriarch Jacob prophesied on his deathbed that "the scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes," (**Genesis 49:10**) signifying that tribal leadership and kingship would anchor in Judah until the coming of the Messiah.

The covenant was repeated in the Psalms:

**- Psalm 89:3** - "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah."

The prophet Jeremiah reaffirmed this promise:

**- Jeremiah 23:5** - "I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land"

**- Jeremiah 33:17** - "For thus saith the Lord; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel;"

Interestingly, the Davidic covenant affects not only Israel but all people. After hearing Nathan's prophecy, David prays:

**- 2 Samuel 7:19** - "And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord GOD; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord GOD?"

The last phrase can be translated as a statement rather than a question. The word "man" uses a Hebrew word for humanity - *ādām*. The word for “manner” is *tora*. Most other translations make this a declaration: "this is instruction for all mankind" or even "this is the charter/instruction/Law/Torah for humanity,”

i.e. this covenant with David concerning the Messiah is a kind of Law or Torah for all humanity.

This is important because of the promise God made to Abraham:

**- Genesis 12:3** - "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

All families and people on earth will be blessed by Abraham and his offspring.

And as Paul tells us, the promise to Abraham concerned not all his descendants but one in particular:

**- Galatians 3:16** - “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”

Thus Matthew headlines his genealogy as "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." (**Matthew 1:1**)

Luke starts at the other end of the lineage.

**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,"

Luke's genealogy of Jesus has been said to be actually tracing Mary's lineage. This is possible, but it is nowhere stated. Luke even starts the list with Joseph.

Luke pushes the genealogy past Abraham to Adam, then to God Himself (**Luke 3:38**), reminding Gentile readers that salvation extends beyond the land of Israel and the Jewish people.

Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, the promise of a Messiah/Deliverer

has held out hope to humanity.

**- Genesis 3:15** - "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it [He] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

Now Jesus was about to enter history and our world as one of us, and He would bring deliverance in an unexpected way - He would crush the head of the serpent by His death on the cross.

**Genealogies Were Important**

In tribal societies, knowing one's lineage determined kinship rights, land inheritance, and permitted marriages (such as the role of the *goel* or redeemer in the Book of Ruth). Priests had to prove the pure lineage of marriage partners over multiple generations.

Meticulous registries and genealogical records of royal and priestly lines were stored in the Temple archives, cited by Josephus (Contra Apion 1.30-36). Rabbinic tradition recounts that Gamaliel could consult "the public registers" (m. Taʿan. 2:1). Such archives, available until A.D. 70, offered Luke verifiable data when composing his orderly account (Luke 1:3).

Catalogues of ossuary inscriptions in Jerusalem list names like Matat, Matatha and Mattathias, which are also found in Jesus' genealogy. One even mirrors Luke's phrase "Matthat, the son of Levi."

Some late historians like Julius Africanus (quoted by Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History), say that King Herod the Great burned public genealogical registers of Jewish families to obscure the backgrounds of any rivals to the throne. But Josephus doesn't mention this, so it is unclear if that happened.

But after the Temple was destroyed so were its genealogical archives. Some rabbis kept scattered records, but the last of these were lost around 1000 A.D. There is no way even to know one's tribe or whether a person comes from the line of Aaron. Jews assume those named Cohen were from the priestly line. DNA tests are being explored to try to reestablish priestly identities.

**Levirate Marriage**

Jesus' genealogy is marked out by some oddities, which, considered as a whole, are suggestive of both a levirate marriage and an adoption event in Jesus' past ancestry.

**- Deuteronomy 25:5-6** - "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel."

This is what happened when Boaz married Ruth. As closest kin, after Tob refused, Boaz married Ruth and it was his duty to raising up offspring in his brother Mahlon's name "that his name be not put out of Israel."

In that case for instance, David's lineage could be shown to run through either or both Boaz or Mahlon.

Neither Luke nor Matthew chose to mention Mahlon in their genealogies, probably because Mahlon was a name that should actually have been "put out of Israel." For that reason Matthew also leaves out the names of some of the bad kings of Judah (Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah).

But elsewhere in the lists there seems to be not only a levirate marriage reflected, but also an adoption.

**Jeconiah's Curse**

One list of Jesus' ancestors includes the last king of Judah, Jeconiah. This was a problem, because that king was cursed along with his descendants.

**- Jeremiah 23:30** - "Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah."

i.e. Jeconiah's descendants would lose their right to inherit the throne of David.

Luke's list of ancestors goes through his son Nathan, a lesser branch of David's line, rather than Solomon, presumably avoiding the curse on Jeconiah's seed. But God had in fact ordered events to give several layers of protection.

Despite being cursed with childlessness, elsewhere, in **1 Chronicles 3:15-19,** Jeconiah is listed as having had seven sons. It may be that “write this man as childless” means “consider this man as childless” even if he fathers children, because they will not prosper or rule. Whatever it means, it was not good news for Jeeconiah.

What happened?

Jeconiah repented.

Instead of defying the Babylonians, he finally did as God had instructed him and surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar, who then spared his life. Because of his repentance, God rescinded Jeremiah's prophecy against Jeconiah (although this is not specifically stated but inferred by events).

But God won't contradict Himself. As in **Esther 8:8**, the kings decree once sealed with his signet ring cannot be turned back. A second decree didn't contradict the first, but allowed Jews to defend themselves.

**A Signet Ring**

God initially had criticized Jeconiah for his wanton, sinful lifestyle.

**- Jeremiah 22:24-25** - "As I live, saith the LORD, though Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence; And I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans."

A signet ring not only was a badge of kingship, but was used to seal messages and decrees.

Only two people in Scripture are likened to signet rings — Jeconiah and Zerubbabel.

Zerubbabel is listed as a grandson of Jeconiah.

Remember we studied how Zerubbabel along with Joshua the High Priest led in the rebuilding of the Temple after the exile. They were pictured by the prophets as Messianic figures and Zerubbabel is likened to God's signet ring (**Haggai 2:23**).

**- Haggai 2:23** - "In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts."

In effect, God is saying that Zerubbabel is the "signet ring" that Jeconiah should have been.

Zerubbabel was thus a remarkable individual — his name means a 'seed of Babylon' , but he was also a seed of David by biological descent (per Luke's genealogy), a descendant of Judah's last king, and the man under whose headship God chose to lead his people back from exile.

But now there's another problem. In the **1 Chronicles 3** list, Zerubbabel is said to be the son of Pedaiah. Everywhere else - including our two genealogies of Jesus - he is "the son of Shealtel.

Some scholars believe Shaltiel was distinctive in two ways. The name 'Shealtiel' may even mean 'I borrowed him'. He was probably adopted into Jeconiah's family. Then he died before having children, and his brother Pedaiah accepted a leverate marriage that led to the birth of Zerubbabel , so that Shaltiel's name would not be "put out of Israel."

If Shaltiel was indeed adopted, then he was not "of the seed" of Jeconiah, and thus immune from the curse. But he was in the legitimate line of David's royal dynasty through adoption

Matthew connects Shealtiel back to David via the kings of Judah (Shealtiel's legal line), while Luke connects him back to David via his biological line — through a lesser known branch of David's family tree running through Nathan rather than Solomon..

Thus there were at least  three different layers of protection between the curse and Jesus.

All this digging into genealogies reveals the extent that God would go to in preserving his promises and bringing them to fruition in Jesus, the Messiah.

**Resources**

Jesus' Genealogies: Contradictory or complementary?
https://www.oneforisrael.org/jesus-genealogies-contradictory-or-complimentary/