The Genealogies of Jesus

Matthew's genealogy (1:1-17) has caused consternation and confusion for many readers of the New Testament. Countless Bible School teachers have begun the study of Matthew's gospel feeling that necessary attention must be devoted to the study of this long list of names from the Old Testament, only to abandon the genealogy mid-stream and jump straight to the birth narratives. Matthew's genealogy is largely ignored as a source of study in the local church.

I'm convinced that Matthew's genealogy is an integral part of his introduction to the life of Jesus. He claims something significant about Jesus. It was never meant to suggest that each name in the list can teach us something about Jesus individually. Rather, it was intentionally designed to convey important clues about Jesus' identity, his role, and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy regarding the coming Davidic king.

The Purpose and Use of Genealogies in Antiquity

It's impossible to overestimate the importance that genealogies had for the Jewish people during Jesus' day. Genealogies in the OT were recorded for a number of reasons.[1] The genealogies recorded in the book of Genesis seem to be given to explain how God fashioned a nation for himself from his own creation, Adam. At every point along the way the significant players in the story are shown to spring from the stock and seed of their fathers, who eventually make their way back to Adam. At some points genealogies are given to demonstrate how one tribal group intersects with another (as with Ruth 4:18-22, which demonstrates how the Moabitess became a part of David's family tree). Genealogies were also used to legitimize the line of the kings and demonstrate that a person has a legitimate claim to the throne (e.g., Zerubbabel, whose rule as governor over Judah in the return from Exile is authenticated by his Davidic descent, Hag. 1:1, 1 Chr. 3:19).

The most significant and widespread use of genealogies in ancient Israel was in maintaining the purity of the priesthood. Since the offices of the priests and the Levites were hereditary in nature (only those who belonged to the tribe of Levi could officially serve in the Temple), official genealogies had to be kept in order to maintain the purity of the priesthood. According to the OT the priests of Israel were required to have descended from the tribe of Levi (Num. 3:1-20). Maintaining these standards of racial purity was of the utmost importance in ancient Israel, particularly in the return from Exile. Ezra records a number of lists (not genealogies, *per se*) of those from priestly descent who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, hinting that tribal purity was still a major requirement for the post-exilic priesthood (Ez. 2:36-60; cf. Neh. 7:39-62, 12:1-26). Ezra also records the names of those who were *not* able to establish their Levitical descent and puts them on probationary status until their lineage can be determined (Ez. 2:61-63; cf. Neh. 7:63-65). Intermarriage with foreign women was a major problem during the Exile, prompting Ezra to list for public record the names of those who had been guilty of the offense (Ez. 10:18-44).

Racial purity among the priests and Levites was a concern long past the return from Exile. From that time forward records were kept in the Temple that established the priestly lines. Each family head was expected to keep genealogical records to prove ancestry, and these

---

[1]For a concise treatment see M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), 77-82; Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *Luke1-9*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 489-90.

documents were used in the Temple for cross-referencing and updating.[2] The first-century priest Josephus claimed to have used these public records to establish his genealogy back some 250 years,[3] and each time Jerusalem was overrun by the pagans (e.g., Antiochus, Pompey) the first priority the priests had when returning was fashioning new genealogies from the ancient records.[4] This becomes important for establishing the accuracy of the genealogies recorded in Matthew and Luke, for if either of these genealogies had been falsified (even for theological reasons) their inaccuracy could have been easily challenged by referencing the public records.

So the fact that Matthew and Luke include genealogies in their respective Gospels is not surprising. It's normal, and fits right with the expectations that persons of great importance in Israel's history be able to legitimize their family tree.

Matthew's Genealogy: Section One
In order to uncover Matthew's purpose for the genealogy, we must now stop to examine his list of names in greater detail. In order to uncover his structure (not name by name, for this wearies the mind) I think we will do better to examine Matthew's genealogy section by section. His recitation of certain lists from the OT suggests that this it is his desire that we proceed in this fashion.

[1]A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ
> *the son of David,*
> *the son of Abraham:*

Matthew hints at the very outset of his genealogy that his purpose is to establish Jesus' identity. He asserts from the start that this genealogical record (not the *history* of Jesus Christ, as some have argued)[5] not only that Jesus is a pure Israelite (being the son of Abraham), but also that he stands in the line of kings that would reign on David's throne forever (2 Sam. 7:13-14). In short, **Matthew is affirming that Jesus is the Great "Son of David."**

> *Abraham was the father of Isaac,*
> > *Isaac the father of Jacob,*
> > *Jacob the Father of Judah and his brothers.*

Matthew's list begins, not with a recitation of the descendants of humanity stretching back to Adam, but with Abraham. In some of the inter-testamental texts the "son of Abraham" became a significant title for the Messiah (*T. Levi* 8:15). But there's probably a more significant reason that Matthew calls Jesus "Son of Abraham," and that's to point to Jesus as the fulfillment of the covenant promises of Israel. Abraham was the father of the Jewish people and the one to

---

[2] Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.7.30-37. Josephus testifies that during his day every member of the priestly clans would send their written ancestry to Jerusalem so that the priests there could maintain accurate genealogies, thus preserving the purity of the priestly line. Josephus boasts that during his day the generations of the priesthood could be established to an interval of 2,000 years.

[3]*Vita*, 6.

[4]Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.7.34-35.

[5]Some see the word *geneseōs* used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) as denoting a certain kind of Jewish history. That is hardly the case here, as Matthew's list is not a *history* of Jesus Christ, but rather a list of names corresponding with a typical family genealogy. See Carson, *Matthew*, Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 61.

whom God said, "I will make your descendants like the sands of the seas" (Gen. 22:17). He had a special relationship with God, one that Paul will point to as the basis of the righteousness that comes from God apart from observing the letter of the Law (see Gen. 12:1-3; 17:7; 22:18; Rom. 4:1-25; Gal. 3:16). To Abraham was the promise given that God would fashion for himself a people out of Abraham's seed whose descendants would be innumerable (Gen. 12:1-7; Heb. 11:8-12). By mentioning Abraham, Matthew clearly establishes Jesus as an heir to the promise of Abraham—a true Israelite.

The next section of Matthew's list proceeds as any student of the Hebrew Scriptures might expect: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve descendants of Jacob (who become the patron names of the Twelve Tribes). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are frequently mentioned together throughout Scripture as a formulaic way of connecting the people of Israel with the Patriarchs, even a formulaic way of referring to the nation of Israel itself.[6] Judah was born to Jacob, and rather than list the twelve descendants of Jacob (as might be expected in a Jewish genealogy),[7] Matthew is only concerned to mention Judah, for from Judah did the kings of Biblical antiquity spring. More specifically, King David was born from the line of Judah. Matthew doesn't list all twelve of Jacob's descendants here because he is only concerned to establish the line of kings through David, from which came Jesus, the Great Davidic King.

> [3]*Judah the father of Perez and Zerah,*
> *whose mother was Tamar*
>
> ,

The account of Judah's offspring with Tamar and her birth of the twins Perez and Zerah is a disturbing story fraught with deception and conflict (Gen. 38). Judah originally had three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. Er was wicked in the sight of God, so he had him put to death (for reasons unspecified in Gen. 38:6-7). Er married Tamar, but provided her with no children. Er's brother Onan was obliged by the law of Israel to marry Tamar and provide descendants, not only for her, but for the family line of Judah. Onan tried to subvert this process by spilling his seed on the ground, thereby sabotaging the natural means of ensuring descendants for Judah. Judah, not wanting to give Tamar to his third and final son, sends her back home to live with her father. Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute, lays with Judah, becomes pregnant by him and fulfills the original intent of the law (albeit by some very strange means). The legal descendants of Judah are born to her: the twins Perez and Zerah.

Why mention Perez and this sordid account in Jesus' genealogy? Why bring up such a problematic account in order to show that Jesus is the righteous descendant of David? Because Perez is the natural descendant of Judah, and takes us to the next section in the genealogical record.

> *Perez the father of Hezron,*
> *Hezron the father of Ram,*
> [4]*Ram the father of Amminadab,*

---

[6]The phrase first appears in abbreviated form as Jacob prays to the "God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac" (Gen. 32:9). Subsequent references begin to refer to the three patriarchs in tandem: Gen. 50:24; Ex. 2:24; 3:6, 15-16; 4:5; 6:3, 8; 33:1; Lev. 26:42; Num. 32:11; Deut. 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 29:13; 30:20; 34:4; 2 Kings 13:23; Jer. 33:26; Mt. 22:32; Lk. 13:28; Acts 3:13; 7:8, 32.

[7]Cf. Gen. 35:23-26; 46:8-25; 49:1-28; Num. 1:5-15, 20-53; 2:3-33; 13:4-15; 26:5-50; Deut. 33:1-29; 1 Chr. 2:1-2; Ezek. 48:1-7, 23-29; Rev. 7:5-8.

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,
[5]Salmon the father of Boaz,
  whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed,
  whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,
[6]and Jesse the father of King David.

This entire section is taken almost word-for-word from **Ruth 4:18-22** (see table below)**.** The case is made there that the Moabitess Ruth is one of the significant links in the Messianic chain. She marries Boaz, who is from the line of Judah, and she bears him a son, named Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse, who was the father of David. During the time of famine described early in the book of Ruth, it seemed as if the Jewish people were in danger of losing everything. But through God's providence Elimelech and his family travel to Moab to find food, leave Naomi and Ruth widowed there, and the Moabitess Ruth is eventually taken in by Boaz, a relative of Elimelech and a member of the tribe of Judah. To Ruth and Boaz is born Obed, the grandfather of David.

Matthew 1:3-6	Ruth 4:18-22
Perez the father of Hezron,	Perez was the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,	Hezron the father of Ram
Ram the father of Amminadab,	Ram the father of Amminadab
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,	Amminadab the fahter of Nahshon
Nahshon the father of Salmon,	Nahshon the father of Salmon
Salmon the father of Boaz,	Salmon the father of Boaz
whose mother was Rahab,	
Boaz the father of Obed,	Boaz the father of Obed
whose mother was Ruth,	
Obed the father of Jesse,	Obed the father of Jesse
and Jesse the father of *King* David	and Jesse the father of David.

Matthew doesn't just refer to him as "David." He refers to him as "King David." This genealogy is not simply chronological or literal for him. He's trying to make a theological point with the way he's structured it: that Jesus is the Great Davidic King. So far, he's led us up to the time of David, anticipating the promise that the Messiah would come from David's line. His readers would naturally have great anticipation for what comes next and who springs from the Davidic line.

A Note on the Women: It's interesting to note here that Matthew has now included three women in his genealogy. The inclusion of Bathsheba (Matt. 1:6, "Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah") and Mary (Matt. 1:16) will make five total. While it's not unheard of to include females in ancient genealogies, the practice is atypical.[8] Why would Matthew include them? Surely he doesn't need them to further the genealogical tree, for the account in Ruth establishes David's ancestry quite nicely *without* including the names of any women.

---

[8]Johnson, *Purpose of Biblical Genealogies*, 153.

Various explanations have been asserted to account for Matthew's inclusion of these women. Some suggest that they are included because they are Gentiles, foreshadowing the inclusion of the Gentiles into Israel.[9] While it's clear that Rahab was a Canaanite (Josh. 2:1-4), and Ruth a Moabitess (Ruth 1:4), the evidence is a bit less clear regarding Tamar (though the text of Gen. 38 is unclear, she is believed in Jewish lore to have been an Aramean[10]) and Bathsheba (who was married to Uriah the Hittite, but is the daughter of a man known to David simply as "Eliam"; 2 Sam. 11:3). Mary certainly doesn't fall in the category of Gentile.

It has been customary (even quite popular) to suggest that these women were included in the genealogy because of their sordid backgrounds. Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba all certainly qualify as sexually promiscuous. But once again, no one remotely familiar with the accounts of Ruth and Mary would categorize their depiction in the biblical record as anything less than honorable.

A better option to explain Matthew's inclusion of these women in the genealogy of Jesus probably has to do with the confusing (even questionable) circumstances surrounding their offspring and their help in accomplishing God's divine plan.[11] Tamar bore offspring to Judah through questionable means, but brought the Godly line of Judah back to Israel (for his previous offspring had all been born to a Canaanite; Gen. 38:2). Rahab has a disreputable background, but helped Joshua and the spies escape Jericho unharmed, fulfilling God's promise regarding the city (Josh. 2:1-24). Matthew indicates also that she has a part to play in the genealogical tree of David by giving birth to Boaz (Matt. 1:5), who took Ruth as his wife. Ruth, though a Moabite woman, is taken by Boaz, her "kinsman redeemer," and becomes the great-grandmother of King David. Bathsheba certainly bears David a son through adulterous means, but that son, Solomon, becomes the immediate fulfillment of prophecy and erects the Temple promised to David's heir (2 Sam. 7:11-13). And the circumstances surrounding Mary's pregnancy were certainly not without doubt. She becomes pregnant before her marriage to Joseph, the baby is not his, and her only explanation seems to be, "The Holy Spirit did it!" Certainly this was the truth, but the story had to have made little sense to those who first heard it. Matthew, by including these other women in his genealogy, shows that Mary stands in a distinguished line of women in Israel's history who bore children under questionable circumstances and furthered God's plan for the nation by doing so.[12]

Matthew's Genealogy: Section Two

The next section (Matt. 1:6b-11) is taken from **1 Chronicles 3:10-16** (see table below)**,** a list of the kings of Judah from the time of Solomon to the time of the exile into Babylon in 586 B.C. This table in 1 Chronicles appears in the list of the direct offspring of David. By tracing the lineage of the kings Matthew is continuing to set up for us the royalty of Jesus' line and preparing us to affirm Jesus as the anticipated Great Davidic King.

---

[9]Representative is Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 78-80.

[10]*Jubilees* 41:1

[11]R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1979), 71-74.

[12]Rabbinic evidence suggests that the four women mentioned in the OT (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba) were revered as proselytes because of their connections to Israelite men and faithfulness to God. For a start, see D. S. Huffman, "Genealogy," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Ed. Joel Green, Scot McKnight, and I. H. Marshall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 255.

Matthew 1:6b-11	1 Chronicles 3:10-16
David was the father of Solomon,	
whose mother had been Uriah's wife,	
Solomon the father of Rehoboam,	Solomon's son was Rehoboam
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,	Abijah his son,
Abijah the father of Asa,	
Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,	Jehoshaphat his son,
Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,	Jehoram his son,
Jehoram the father of Uzziah,	Ahaziah his son,
	Joash his son,
	Amaziah his son,
	Azariah his son,
Uzziah the father of Jotham,	Jotham his son,
Jotham the father of Ahaz,	Ahaz his son,
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,	Hezekiah his son,
Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,	Manasseh his son,
Manasseh the father of Amon,	Amon his son,
Amon the father of Josiah,	Josiah his son.
	The sons of Josiah:
	Johanan the firstborn
	Jehoiakim the second son,
	Zedekiah the third,
	Shallum the fourth
	The successors of Jehoiakim:
and Josiah the father of Jeconiah	Jehoiachin his son,
and his brothers	and Zedekiah
at the time of the exile to Babylon.	

       We discover a few items worth mentioning when we compare this section of Matthew's genealogy with that provided by the Chronicler. The first (only a matter of clarification) is that a number of the men listed here have alternate names. Uzziah (Mt. 1:8) is the same as Ahazia (1 Chr. 3:11) and Jeconiah (Mt. 1:11) synonymous with Jehoiachin (1 Chr. 3:16). But this should not cause us much concern, for Azariah (1 Chr. 3:12) is also called Uzziah in the OT record (2 Chr. 26:1) and Johanan (1 Chr. 3:12) is identified as the son of Josiah who reigned three months between Josiah and that of his own brother Jehoiakim (2 Chr. 36:11-5; 2 Kings 23:30-31). Some of the differences in the comparison of the lists can be explained by a simple understanding that some of the men listed here have alternate names.

       But more significant are Matthew's omissions. A quick perusal of the chart above reveals that Matthew, while using the text of 1 Chronicles 3 as a basic source, omits the names of Joash, Amaziah, and Azariah as the direct descendants of Ahazia, and fails to mention the immediate offspring of Josiah (Johanan, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah, and Shallum). Also missing from Matthew's list is the last name of Zedekiah, Jehoiakim's son. Why does he omit these names?

One suggestion often made, particularly in regard to Joash, Amaziah, and Azariah, is that they were wicked kings associated with King Ahab.[13] But a careful study of Kings and Chronicles reveals a number of inconsistencies with this approach. Ahaziah is *included* in the genealogy, though he was related by marriage to Ahab (2 Kings 8:27). Matthew then omits Joash who, though responsible for killing Zechariah the priest (2 Chr. 24:21), gets credit for repairing the Temple in his day (2 Kings 12). Amaziah is likely omitted because he brought back idols from Seir and made sacrifices to them (2 Chr. 25:11-12), Azariah because he tried to offer incense to the Lord in the Temple (a function prohibited by the Law for anyone not of Levitical descent) and was smitten with leprosy (2 Chr. 26:16-23). All the while wicked kings like Ahaz and Manasseh are included. To say that Matthew omits certain kings from the Davidic ancestry because of their wickedness doesn't take full account of the biblical history from which Matthew is drawing.

In the end, nobody really knows why Matthew has omitted the names of certain kings in the Davidic dynasty and why he has allowed others to remain. What *is* clear is that Matthew passes over some names and structures his record of Jesus' genealogy to make a point about Jesus standing directly in the line of the Davidic kings of Judah. Omitting them helps Matthew structure his genealogy around the "fourteens" that he will mention in 1:17 (which again help him make his point about Jesus being the Great Son of David). Four hundred years pass between the four generations from Perez to Amminadab, and there are doubtless names that have been omitted there. It's important to remember that the word "the father of" (Gk., *gennao*, "birthed") doesn't always mean the literal "father," anymore than Eve was the literal "mother of all the living" (Gen. 3:20). The flexible use of the verb *gennao* allows Matthew to claim that Josiah "begat" Jehoiachin, even though there were two generations between them. This affords well with the common pattern of genealogies elsewhere in the biblical record[14] and will help us make sense of some apparent contradictions in the final section of Matthew's genealogy.

Matthew's Genealogy: Section Three

The final section of Matthew's genealogy begins with a time marker: "after the Exile to Babylon" (Mt. 1:12). Matthew has given us the genealogy of Jesus from the beginnings of the covenant promise with Abraham to the time of the Davidic monarchy (Section One) and the continued lineage of the line of David through the kings of Judah until the "end" of Israel's history (the Babylonian Exile). Now Matthew takes us through the genealogical record from the time of the Exile to the time of Joseph, showing that through the Exile until the time of Jesus' birth the line of David had remained intact. Jesus is born heir to the Davidic dynasty.

> [12]*After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,*
> *Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,*
> [13]*Zerubbabel the father of Abiud,*
> *Abiud the father of Eliakim,*
> *Eliakim the father of Azor,*

---

[13]John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, Eds. I. H. Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 80; Carson, *Matthew,* 67.

[14]For instance, see Nehemiah 11:4-6 where the men who returned from the Exile from the tribe of Judah include Athaiah, who is removed from Perez (son of Judah) by only 6 generations, and Masseiah removed from Judah's son Shelah by only 7 generations. The actual list is much longer, and the brevity of the list is no compromise upon its legitimacy.

> [14]*Azor the father of Zadok,*
> *Zadok the father of Akim,*
> *Akim the father of Eliud,*
> [15]*Eliud the father of Eleazar,*
> *Eleazar the father of Matthan,*
> *Matthan the father of Jacob,*
> [16]*and Jacob the father of Joseph,*
>   *the husband of Mary,*
>   *of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ*

Section Three (Mt. 1:12-16) is a bit more difficult to piece together. Sections One and Two came from established genealogical evidence clearly found in the OT, but Section Three can only be established from OT records into the first two or three generations. To be certain, some of this evidence can be pieced together from statements made in the post-exilic biblical documents. Once again, **1 Chronicles 3:17 ff.** becomes an important source for our inquiry. Consider the similarities to the first part of Matthew's list:

Matthew 1:12	**1 Chronicles 3:17-18**
	The descendants of Jehoiachin the captive:
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,	Shealtiel his son
	Malkiram,
	Pedaiah,
	Shenazzar,
	Jekamiah,
	Hoshama and
	Nedabiah.
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel	The sons of Pedaiah:
	Zerubbabel and
	Shimei.

Matthew is again skipping generations (here omitting Pedaiah between Shealtiel and Zerubbabel). According to the text of 1 Chronicles Shealtiel was the *uncle* of Zerubbabel. As we noted earlier, ancient genealogical records were not constructed to present data in minute definitions, but broad strokes, so either 1) the parallel line of Shealtiel's brother Pedaiah is sufficient to maintain the integrity of the family line or 2) Shealtiel adopted Zerubbabel upon Pedaiah's death.[15] In either case, brevity is no trade-off for accuracy, and Matthew has a larger argument to make, one which depends upon him listing only fourteen generations between Jeconiah and Joseph.

Once we get to Zerubbabel our sources break down. We have no knowledge of the generations Matthew lists between Zerubbabel and Joseph. In fact, when we compare Matthew and Luke, we find two sons of Zerubbabel (Abiud and Resa, respectively) that are nowhere mentioned in the post-exilic biblical literature.

Does this mean that Matthew and Luke aren't to be trusted for the information they provide to us regarding the descendants of David from Zerubbabel to Joseph? Hardly. Detailed records of the genealogies of the tribes of Israel were kept in Jerusalem and commonly used by

---

[15]Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 55.

both priests (who, as we established earlier, were required to keep genealogical records to establish their Levitical descent) and Jews who had no priestly connections whatsoever.[16] Paul knew his genealogy back to the tribal patriarch Benjamin (Phil. 3:5; Rom. 11:1), and in the late first century the Roman Emperor Domitian, in response to Christian rhetoric about Christ's reappearing kingdom, ordered all the descendants of David executed[17] (suggesting that in the late first century there were those who could still demonstrate their ancestry back to the tribe of Judah). Even if it couldn't be established by memory or family tradition, the Jewish priest Josephus (contemporary with Jesus) indicated that there were public registers available in Jerusalem which helped him compile his own genealogy.[18] So it's not inconceivable that Matthew used public information to help him compile the final part of his genealogy. Keep in mind also that Jesus' brothers, one of whom (James) was helpful in the administration of the Jerusalem church, would have been able to give information to the apostles and evangelists regarding the ancestry of Mary and Joseph. We have no reason to suspect that Matthew's genealogy (or Luke's for that matter) is inaccurate in any way.

So What's the Point?

We have been saying all along that Matthew is omitting certain men from his genealogy to structure three sections of "fourteens" to make a theological point about Jesus. Matthew now gives us a precise reason why he's left out some of the names in the genealogies, and that's specifically to craft a family tree of Jesus through David that rests on fourteen generations in three separate periods: fourteen from the time of the Patriarchs to the Monarchy, fourteen from the time of the Monarchy to the Exile, and fourteen from the Exile to the Christ.[19]

> *[17]Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.*

But what is the theological point Matthew is trying to make? What do these "fourteens" represent? Why does Matthew structure them according to fourteens? Why not "40," which is certainly a biblical number? Why not "7," which is more in line with the apocalyptic literature common in first-century Judaism? Why not "12" after the Twelve Tribes?

---

[16]See J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 275-78, who indicates that in Jesus' day there was still speculation about the genealogies of the tribes of David and Benjamin.

[17]Eusebius, *History of the Church*. 3:19-20. He cites a passage in Hegesippus, who claims that Domitian was afraid, as was Herod, of Christ's impending Kingdom. The grandsons of Jude (the brother of Jesus) were accused of being descendants of David, and were taken before Domitian (who seemingly was more interested in how much money was at their disposal). When they demonstrated to his approval that they were simple peasants with no disposable cash, he let them go. Their Davidic ancestry was never disproven.

[18]*Against Apion* I.7.30-37.

[19]Matthew's enumeration of the generations is a bit complicated. Counting Adam and David in Section One gets us to fourteen quite nicely. But to get to fourteen in Section Two, one must NOT count David (even though he's listed twice) and begin with Solomon. For Section Three we must do the opposite: count Jeconiah again, even though he was counted in Section Two. Only by including Jeconiah does Section Three include fourteen generations. H. C. Waetjen, "Genealogy as the Key to Matthew," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 207-214, suggests, pointing to the different form of the verb *egennethe* in 1:16, that Mary is to be counted as one of the generations. But this goes against Matthew's pattern, for the women in this genealogy are mentioned peripherally in connection with their husbands, not as contributors per se. I think a clear break is articulated by Matthew in 1:12 ("After the exile to Babylon:"), begging Jeconiah to be counted twice. For a complete discussion of the problems in enumeration of the "fourteens" see Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 74-84.

One theory suggests that Matthew is actually structuring these along six periods of "7" rather than three periods of fourteen. The idea is that, since "7" represents completeness in the apocalyptic mindset,[20] that he's describing the 6 periods that have passed, with the age of the Christ being the "7", or the "completion of the Kingdom."[21] But this interpretation misses the very obvious fact that Matthew plainly says there are "fourteen" generations in each period, not two groups of seven.

The more plausible theory is that he's structuring these generations after the numerology of David's name, a practice called *gematria*, a mystical interpretation of words or names uncovered by assigning numeric values to letters. The numeric value of a word or name is deduced by adding the values assigned to the specific consonants or letters. Understanding this practice helps to explain John's expectation that readers of the Apocalypse be able to "calculate the number of the beast" in Rev. 13:18. To use the Hebrew alphabet, for example, the first letter (Aleph) would be assigned a numeric value of "1," the second letter (Beth) a value of "2," etc. The name "David" was comprised of three consonants: D-W-D. The numeric value of the name "David" (*dawid*, D-4, W-6, D-4) equals "14." This is the more likely explanation, for no other interpretation seems to give us a clue as to why Matthew has chosen the fourteen generations as a unit of significance.[22]

The link to David's name in the lineage here suggests that Matthew is intending from the very outset to show that Jesus is the Messiah and the Great Son of David. We have seen this connection at every step along the way, from Matthew's introduction of Jesus as "the son of David" (1:1), his use of the genealogies in connection with Ruth (1:3-6), his description of David as "King" (1:6), to his use of a genealogical record in Chronicles specifically introduced, "These were the sons of David" (1 Chr. 3:1-18). We have seen in the previous chapter that Matthew presents Jesus as the Son of David more than any other evangelist, and he makes his intentions known from the first verse and through the genealogy, demonstrating that at every point in Israel's history, the promise given to David to have one of his descendants sit on his throne, though seemingly in danger of lacking fulfillment through the Exile, has now come to fruition in Jesus Christ.

Luke's Genealogy (3:23-38)

Matthew isn't the only evangelist to record a genealogy of Jesus' ancestry. Luke, immediately after his account of Jesus' baptism, begins to articulate his version of Jesus' ancestry. I say "his version" because the two accounts (Matthew and Luke) differ considerably in their presentation of Jesus' ancestry. First, a glimpse at Luke's list is in order, followed by a comparison with Matthew's genealogy.

The first, and most obvious, item worth mentioning about Luke's genealogy is that he's working in opposite direction from Matthew. Matthew began with Abraham and worked his way down to David and finally Joseph. Luke begins with Joseph and traces his lineage through

---

[20]For a fuller discussion of apocalyptic numerology see Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 34-37; D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 195-202; Christopher A. Davis, *Revelation*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin: College Press, 2000), 19-20.

[21]I am intentionally oversimplifying a very complex argument that is more articulate in Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 74-81. He presents evidence there that suggests it was common practice to structure genealogical records around numerical intervals.

[22]Waetjen, "Genealogy," 206-207, presents evidence that in the first century rabbinic lore it was commonly accepted to speak of "fifteen generations from Abraham to Solomon" (i.e, fourteen from Abraham to David).

David back to Abraham, Adam, "the son of God" (3:38). Whereas Matthew structures his genealogy in order to communicate that Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies surrounding the everlasting throne of David, Luke seems to have structured his genealogy in such a way as to communicate that Jesus is both prophet of Israel[23] and Son of God.[24]

     Luke's genealogy is not evenly divided into categories as is Matthew's.[25] The initial section (I am working backwards for clarity) from Adam to Shem is taken directly from the written account of Adam's line in Genesis 5.

Luke 3:36-38 (reversed)	Genesis 5:1-33
God	God
Adam	Adam
Seth	Seth
Enosh	Enosh
Kenan	Kenan
Mahalalel	Mahalalel
Jared	Jared
Enoch	Enoch
Methuselah	Methuselah
Lamech	Lamech
Noah	Noah
Shem	Shem

The next sections of Luke's genealogy (from Shem to Peleg) come directly from the table of the descendants of Shem in Genesis 10:21-25 and 11:10-26 (demonstrated in the table below).

Luke 3:34-36 (reversed)	Genesis 11:10-26
Shem	Shem

---

[23]Notions of the prophetic abound in Luke's gospel, including the prophecies surrounding the births of John the Baptist (1:13-20, 67-79) and Jesus (1:29-33), the prophetic utterances of Simeon and Anna (2:25-38), Jesus' identification of himself as prophet (4:17-27), to his glorification in the presence of the two greatest prophets of Israel (9:28-36). For more on Luke's genealogy as a presentation of Jesus as prophet, see E. M. Abel, "The Genealogies of Jesus *HO CHRISTOS,*" *New Testament Studies* 20 (1973): 205-210; Johnson, *Purpose of Biblical Genealogies*, 240-252.

[24]Though the genealogy has a clearly Jewish background, Luke's Gentile readers would have had opportunity to identify Jesus with the divine Hellenistic hero (often called "son of God"). For a description of the concept in Hellenistic literature, see O. Culmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 271-72. The concept was often synonymous with the phrase "son of God," a concept that Luke seems to be employing for Jesus in the pericopae surrounding the genealogy (Jesus' baptism, in which Jesus is addressed "my son" by God [3:21-22] and the temptation, in which Jesus' claim to be "Son of God" is challenged [4:9]). Conservative scholarship has downplayed the connection to this concept in the Gospels for fear of minimizing Jesus' miracles as legend (as was typical in the Hellenistic hero stories). For an honest critique see B. L. Blackburn "Divine Man/*THEIOS ANĒR*," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels,* Eds. Joel Green, Scot McKnight and I. H. Marshall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 189-92.

[25]The common consensus regarding Luke's structure is that he has arranged this genealogy in eleven segments of seven names each. Luke fails to indicate any precise structure to his genealogy, and had he, one would expect an explanation, as in Matt. 1:17. Ancient manuscript evidence reveals discrepancy regarding whether Luke's genealogy originally recorded seventy-seven names or seventy-two. For a fuller discussion of the manuscript evidence and the possible meaning of Luke's structure, see Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:9-20*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), 361-62.

Arphaxad	Arphaxad
Cainan	[*Cainan*] Septuagint; see below
Shelah	Shelah
Eber	Eber
Peleg	Peleg
Reu	Reu
Serug	Serug
Nahor	Nahor
Terah	Terah
Abraham	Abram

Readers of the NIV will notice that Cainan is not listed in the Genesis record. Luke seems to not be working from the Hebrew text of the OT, but using the Septuagint (OT Hebrew translated into Greek), which includes the following verse at Genesis 11:12-13: "When Arphaxad had lived 35 years, he became the father of Cainan. And after he became the father of Cainan, Arphaxad lived 430 years and had other sons and daughters, and then he died. When Cainan had lived 130 years, he became the father of Shelah." This explains Luke's inclusion of Cainan into his genealogy where no record of Cainan can be found to English readers of the OT.

The next section of Luke's genealogy is verbatim with that of Matthew. As we might expect, Luke proceeds from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and Perez (see table on Matthew 1:2-6 above), and then picks up the genealogy recorded in Ruth 4:18-22 which takes us from Perez to David.

At this point Matthew and Luke part ways significantly. Matthew took the genealogical table through David's son Solomon. Luke proceeds in the same fashion to David, but traces the genealogy through David's son Nathan. Some speculate that Luke chooses Nathan's line because he wants to paint Jesus as a prophet, as well as a Davidic King and Son of God. But in order to hold this view we must jump to the conclusion that David's son Nathan and Nathan the prophet are one and the same, and that link is nearly impossible to prove. Zechariah 12:12 may be helpful in establishing Luke's connection with David's son Nathan, for there Nathan's clan is explicitly mentioned in the woes coming upon the house of David. Luke may also have in mind the prophecy of Jer. 22:28-30, which prohibits any of the descendants of Jehoiachin to ever sit on David's throne. Tracing David's line through Nathan, and not through the line of Solomon, helps Luke keep God's promise to David intact (that his throne will endure forever, 2 Sam. 7:13-14) while maintaining the integrity of the prophecy regarding Jehoiachin (a descendant of David through Solomon; 1 Chr. 3:10-16).

Whatever the case regarding Nathan, we have no record of the names given by Luke from Nathan to Neri (Lk. 3:27-31), nor those from Resa to Heli (3:23-27). The only names mentioned there that have any connection with recorded biblical history (let alone Matthew's genealogy) are the names of Zerubbabel and his "father" Shealtiel. Zerubbabel, from the tribe of Judah, was the leader of the exiles returning from Babylon and is well-attested in the post-exilic literature as the "son" of Shealtiel (1 Chr. 3:17-19; Ez. 3:8, 5:2; Hag. 1:1, 12, 14, 2:2, 23).

Luke 3:23-31 (reversed)
David
Nathan
Mattatha

Menna
Melea
Eliakim
Jonam
Joseph
Judah
Simeon
Levi
Matthat
Jorim
Eliezer
Joshua
Er
Elmadam
Cosam
Addi
Melki
Neri
Shealtiel
Zerubbabel
Rhesa
Joanan
Joda
Josech
Semein
Matthathias
Maath
Naggai
Esli
Nahum
Amos
Mattathias
Joseph
Jannai
Melki
Levi
Matthat
Heli
Joseph

But it's at this point that another problem occurs between Matthew and Luke. Matthew seems to indicate that Shealtiel was the son of King Jeconiah (Mt. 1:12) while Luke seems to suggest that he was the son of Neri (Lk. 3:27). Luke may again have in view the pronouncement made by Jeremiah that Jeconiah would have no legal heir sit on his throne (Jer. 22:30). Though Jeconiah is said to have had children (1 Chr. 3:17), none of them actually sit on the throne after his death. Zerubbabel (his great-grandson) serves as the ruling governor at the return of the

exiles from Babylon (Hag. 2:21), but never as king over the nation. Luke may have traced the lineage back through Shealtiel and Neri rather than through the descendants of Jeconiah in view of the pronouncement. There is still difficulty in establishing the exact biological paternity of Shealtiel, but as we have previously noted the genealogies are not exact in this manner and no good options exist for harmonizing the two accounts at this point.

Luke's genealogy, while frought with as many potential conflicts as Matthew's, is to be treated with no less historical accuracy simply because the evidence for solving the problem has been lost to us. In regard to the family tree of Joseph, at very best we know very little about very much. Luke's point, no less theological than Matthew's, is to demonstrate that Jesus has ties to the Davidic monarchy (a point which is explicit in Luke's birth narratives), stands as an heir to the covenant promises made to Abraham, and is, in fact, Son of God. That Luke places his genealogy directly between Jesus' baptism (in which the proclamation is given by God, "You are my son," 3:22) and the temptation account (in which Jesus' divine sonship is questioned by Satan, 4:9) and not at the beginning of his Gospel (as was customary) clearly establishes Luke's claim that Jesus is the Son of God.

One Final Question: Who Was Joseph's Father?
Probably the most debated question with regard to the genealogies in Matthew and Luke is their discrepancy concerning the father of Joseph. Matthew suggests that Joseph was the son of Jacob (Mt. 1:16) while Luke portrays him as the son of Heli (Lk. 3:23). To review the literature one would think this is the most significant problem to be encountered from a comparison of the two genealogies. A number of possibilities have been presented for harmonization, but only four deserve our attention here.

1. *Matthew traces the line of Joseph, Luke the line of Mary*. This popular view has some critical support,[26] but lacks the support of one key piece of evidence: Mary is never mentioned in Luke's genealogy. In both genealogies, Joseph's lineage is clearly established as that which extends back to the Davidic monarchy. Second-century ideas about Mary's Davidic ancestry notwithstanding (see previous chapter), this view has lacked the critical support of most scholars in the modern era.

2. *Matthew gives the kingly descent, Luke the priestly descent*. This view holds well with Matthew's structure of the kings of Judah. And the Lukan birth narratives begin with Mary's connection to Zachariah the priest, whose wife is a "relative" of Mary (1:36). But this position is difficult to maintain, as Luke's birth narratives are focused on situating Jesus squarely in the kingly line of David (1:27, 32, 69; 2:4, 11). The author of Hebrews would have had a much easier time of demonstrating Jesus' priestly ministry had Jesus actually descended from the priestly line (Heb. 6:20-8:6).

3. *One traces the legal descent, another the actual descent.* I neglect to mention which one takes a particular route, for both options have been held in interpretive history. In this

---

[26]A view held by J. G. Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1930), 202-209. Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), 313-19, believe Luke's phrase "as was supposed" provides a clue that Mary's ancestry is really in view, that Mary was descended from David and that Luke establishes the actual descent of Jesus through Mary, not the legal line through Joseph.

scheme Jacob and Heli are usually brothers, and the legal heir Jacob dies, prompting his wife to be wed to Heli in levirate marriage (see below), making Heli the actual father of Joseph, while retaining Jacob as the legal father (or vice versa). It is difficult to see how the legal descent differs from the actual descent. There are a number of theories related to this idea in one way or another, and Bock sums them up best when he says, "As one can see, this view is possible, but it is very complicated."[27]

4. *Levirate Marriage*. According to the Deuteronomic code (25:5-10) if a man dies and leaves a childless widow, she is to marry his brother and designate her firstborn son a descendant of her dead husband, thus perpetuating his name in Israel. This concept was at least common enough in Jesus' day to prompt a question by the Sadducees (Matt. 22:23-32). Most modern scholars opt for some form of levirate marriage proposal to harmonize the differences here, whether it be with Jacob and Heli,[28] or further up the line with Eleazar and Levi.[29]

None of the possibilities provide an air-tight solution to the problem posed by these two genealogies. We know that Matthew is fond of skipping generations to keep his symmetrical structure intact. In that case, the man he records as "Jacob" may not be Joseph's immediate father. But even if that were so, we would expect him to show up somewhere down the line, and he doesn't. The bulk of the genealogies is verifiable to us through the OT records and is in accordance both with biblical history and the purpose of genealogies in the ancient Jewish world. The public genealogical registries kept in Jerusalem would have provided ample opportunity for skeptics to have proven either Matthew or Luke wrong in their tables. Though Matthew and Luke do seem to be making theological points about Jesus through their genealogies, we have been given no reason to doubt their historicity just because they attempt to make a statement about Jesus' identity through historical means.

---

[27]Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 921.

[28]A solution first proposed by Julius Africanus, recorded in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* 1.7: "Thus Joseph was the son of both." See Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 141, n. 38.

[29]If Jacob and Heli were brothers, and their father was Mattan/Matthat (in Matthew and Luke respectively), then another levirate marriage is needed to explain how Matthan/Matthat has two fathers, namely Eleazar and Levi. Carson , *Matthew,* 64, rightfully points out that if levirate marriage is in view, then one of the evangelists has recorded the actual father and one the legal father. One of them, then, is out of place, since levirate marriage was intended to preserve the name of the deceased father.