

Towards an Understanding of Jesus' Genealogies
Comparing Matthew 1:2-16 and Luke 3:23-38

Matthew

Jesus
 Joseph Mary
 Jacob
 Matthan
 Eleazar
 Eliud
 Achim
 Zadok
 Azor
 Eliakim
 Abihud

Zerubbabel
 Shealtiel
 Jeconiah
 Josiah
 Amon
 Manasseh
 Hezekiah
 Ahaz
 Jotham
 Uzziah
 Joram
 Jehoshaphat
 Asa
 Abijah
 Rehoboam

Solomon
 David Bathsheba
 Jesse
 Obed
 Boaz Ruth
 Salmon Rahab
 Nahshon
 Amminadab

Ram
 Hezron
 Perez
 Judah Tamar
 Jacob
 Isaac
 Abraham

Luke

Jesus
 (as supposed) Joseph
 Eli
 Matthat
 Levi
 Melchi
 Jannai
 Joseph
 Mattathias
 Amos
 Nahum
 Hesli
 Naggai
 Maath
 Mattathias
 Semein
 Josech
 Joda
 Joanan
 Rhesa
 Zerubbabel
 Shealtiel
 Neri
 Melchi
 Addi
 Cosam
 Elmadam
 Er
 Joshua
 Eliezer
 Jorim
 Matthat
 Levi
 Simeon
 Judah
 Joseph
 Jonam
 Eliakim
 Melea
 Menna
 Mattatha
 Nathan
 David
 Jesse
 Obed
 Boaz
 Salmon
 Nahshon
 Amminadab
 Admin
 Ram
 Hezron
 Perez
 Judah
 Jacob
 Isaac
 Abraham
 Terah
 Nahor
 Serug
 Reu
 Peleg
 Heber
 Shelah
 Cainan
 Arphaxad
 Shem
 Noah
 Lamech
 Methuselah
 Enoch
 Jared
 Mahalaleel
 Cainan
 Enosh
 Seth
 Adam
 God

Major differences in the genealogies:

1. Luke locates his genealogy between Jesus' baptism and temptation. Notice that all three places emphasize Jesus as the "Son of God." Matthew locates his genealogy at the beginning of his gospel.
2. Luke begins with Jesus and works backwards to Adam. Matthew begins with Abraham and then traces the royal line from David to Jesus.
3. Luke traces the family line from Adam to Jesus. Matthew only includes from Abraham to Jesus.
4. Matthew arranges his genealogy around three sets of fourteen generations (Matthew 1:17). As you can see, to fit this pattern, Matthew leaves out many steps in the genealogy, which is common (cf., Matthew 1:1 where Jesus is called "the son of David" and "the son of Abraham"). Luke's genealogy is arranged around eleven groups of seven names.
5. Luke includes only men in his genealogy (which is interesting to me since one of Luke's themes is Jesus' interaction with and care for women (e.g., 1:5, 24-58; 7:12-13, 37-50; 8:2-3; 10:38-42; 23:27-29; 23:55-24:10). Matthew includes women in his genealogy. (It is interesting to note the reputation and natural origin of the women he includes).
6. Luke seems to say that Jesus' "granddaddy" was a man named Eli and follows his line to David through Nathan. Matthew seems to say that Jesus' "granddaddy" was a man named Jacob and follows his line to David through the royal line of Solomon.

How can both genealogies be true?!? Possible solutions:

1. Matthew is providing the genealogy of Joseph, the legal father of Jesus. Luke as actually giving the genealogy of Mary so that "Joseph, the son of Eli" should be read as "Joseph, the son of Eli *by marriage*." Those arguing against this view simply say, "Luke doesn't even mention Mary." However, two things need to be remembered: 1) No women are mentioned in Luke's genealogy, and 2) Luke is speaking of a virgin birth, which is unprecedented in history. We don't know how historians of his day would communicate a virgin birth--since Jesus is the only one!
2. There are two other popular solutions that require an understanding of "levirate marriage". Basically, when an Israelite man died without an heir, God commanded his next of kin (usually his brother) to marry her so that their firstborn could assume the name of the dead brother (Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Ruth 3:9-13; 4:1-10; Luke 20:27-33). The purpose of levirate marriage was to keep the name and family-line of a deceased brother alive.

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Works used extensively in this document:

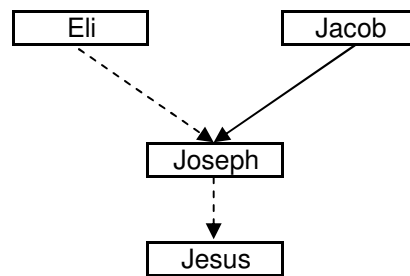
1. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 348-60.
2. Leon Morris, *Luke*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris, vol. 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 118-20.
3. John Piper, "Who Was Jesus' Grandfather?" www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/who-was-jesus-grandfather

Possible solutions to the genealogical mystery in Matthew 1 and Luke 3:

2a. Africanus (c. AD 220):

Eli died childless, and his half-brother, Jacob (who had same mother but different father), married Eli's widow and fathered Joseph.

Luke gives his genealogy through Eli, Joseph's legal father.
Matthew gives his genealogy through Jacob, his actual father.

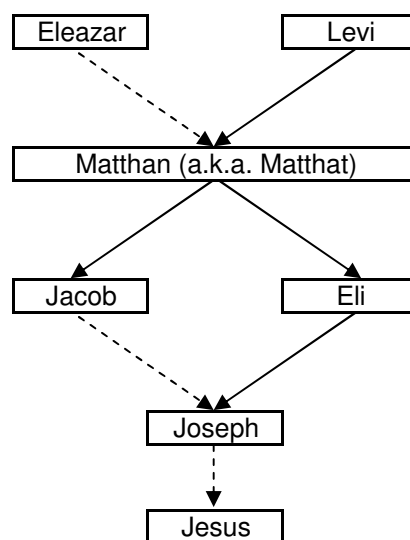


2b. John Gresham Machen (1881-1937):

Matthew's purpose was to show that Jesus was the legal heir of David's throne had Israel's monarchy continued.

Luke's purpose was to give the physical ancestors of Jesus (or in one or two cases a very close adoptive relation).

- Eleazar, the legal heir of David's throne died without widow or son.
- A close relative Levi, married his widow and fathered "Matthan" or "Matthat" (as Luke spells it).*
- Matthan had two sons, Jacob and Eli.
- Jacob dies without sons, and Eli marries his wife and had Joseph.
- Therefore, Joseph is the legal heir through Jacob's line, but the actual physical son of Eli.



* Names with different spellings are quite common in the Bible (For example, compare 2 Kings 11:2 with 11:21 where Joash and Jehoash are different spellings for the same person). We do this in English as well: Geraldine = Gerry, color = colour, etc.

Lessons learned from Luke's genealogy:

1. The fact that these two very different genealogies exist side-by-side in a Bible that claims to be the word of God ought to make us thankful for how faithfully the Bible has been preserved. Do you realize how easy it would have been to "fix" if someone with an agenda wanted to make the Bible "look" error-free? Instead, this mystery is preserved--even though it causes problems for us.

The truth does not have to be protected by being adjusted!

2. Luke is making a point with the placement of Jesus' genealogy tucked in-between Jesus' baptism and temptation. One of the main points of all three of these accounts was to show that Jesus truly is the Son of God. God declares it at the baptism, Satan declares it at the temptation, and Luke declares here in the genealogy.
3. In all respects, Jesus is a fitting Savior! He is the new and better Adam (Luke 4:1-13; cf., Romans 5:12-18). He is the Son of Abraham who inherits all the promises to Israel (Genesis 17:7-8; Galatians 3:16; Matthew 1:1). Jesus is also the Son of David, Israel's true King (Luke 1:32, 69; 2:4; 18:38).
4. As the Savior, Jesus came to rescue--not just God-fearing Jews--but all the descendents of Adam! In fact, Simeon calls Him the "Light of revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:29-32). See also Luke 13:29; 24:47, etc. This is a good reminder that our mission is for "all the nations"--to unite them under one King--King Jesus!