

# THE GENEALOGIES OF THE INCARNATION

*Matthew 1:1-17, Luke 3:23-38*

## INTRODUCTION

So far, in our study of the incarnation, we have considered the sovereignty of God and the incarnation, the need for the incarnation, and the blueprints of the incarnation (the covenants).

This morning, we are turning to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke to think about the genealogies of the incarnation – the genealogies of the Lord Jesus.

Let's pray!

Father, these lists of names spoke volumes to the people of Jesus' day. Please help us to understand their importance today! Grant us understanding by Your Spirit for Your glory, for Jesus' sake, and our eternal good - amen!

## TWO GENEALOGIES?

These genealogies differ in some fundamental ways. Matthew reaches back as far as Abraham and Luke back to Yahweh Himself. Matthew's genealogy moves forward from Abraham to Jesus; Luke's moves backward from Christ. Matthew's genealogy contains several royal ancestors; Luke mentions only David.

So, why are they different? There are various theories.

- Some think that Matthew gives Joseph's genealogy and Luke gives Mary's,

while others say it's the other way around.

- Some think Matthew presents Jesus' royal lineage and Luke presents His physical lineage.
- Other theories involve levirate marriage on one side or another.
- Some suggest that Mary's parents had no sons, so both genealogies are Joseph's, one from his actual line and the other from his role as the heir to Mary's parents; I guess we can toss a coin as to which is which.

The truth is that we aren't told why they differ, and it doesn't matter. There are enough plausible explanations that there is no contradiction here. Each genealogy is meant to stand on its own. Matthew and Luke didn't intend them to be used together.

Let's consider a few lessons from each one.

## THREE LESSONS FROM MATTHEW

*Matthew 1:1-17*

**One: Matthew deliberately parallels family lists found in the book of Genesis.**

In the book of Genesis, genealogies are introduced with the phrase, "These are the generations of." It is often used to identify a major shift in the narrative. So Genesis 2:4 says, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created." Genesis 5 says, "These are the generations of Adam." Genesis 6 turns our attention to Noah. Genesis 11 gives the generations of Terah, Genesis 25 the generations of Isaac, and Genesis 37 the generations of Jacob. The thing about these generations is that they are not simply list of names, but descriptions of events.

The phrase, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ" is the New Testament equivalent of "These are the generations." The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the

greatest of all shifts in God's eternal plan. Everything from Matthew 1:1 to Revelation 22:20 would be included in "These are the generations of Jesus Christ." Between Matthew 1:1 and Revelation 22:20, we have the ancestral history of Jesus, His miraculous birth, God's protection of Him in His infancy, His remarkable three-year ministry, His death and resurrection, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on believers, the establishment of His church, the description of His Second Coming in glory and power, and an introduction to His eternal Kingdom on the new earth.

**Two: Matthew is careful to tie Jesus to David and Abraham.**

**Toward the end of his life, David was given a promise of an eternal heir.**

**12** "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up one of your seed after you, who will come forth from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. **13** He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."  
**(2 Samuel 7:12–13, 2022 LSB)**

This promise was partially fulfilled in Solomon, who built the first Temple of God in Jerusalem. But it was only perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is of the line of David, whose Kingdom God established, who has built a house for God – the church – and whose Kingdom is eternal.

**Yahweh commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac.**

"Where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" Isaac asked. "God will provide a lamb for Himself," Abraham answered. And that is exactly what we see happen. As he was about to sacrifice his son, the Lord stopped him and blessed his faith and obedience, and

**13** Then Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw,  
and behold, there was a ram  
after it had been caught in the thicket by its horns;  
and Abraham went and took the ram  
and offered it up for a burnt offering in the place of his son.  
**(Genesis 22:13, 2022 LSB)**

In John 8:56, Jesus says,

**56** “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day,  
and he saw it and was glad.”  
**(John 8:56, 2022 LSB)**

While Jesus doesn't identify the moment that Abraham saw and rejoiced to see, there is no other event in the life of Abraham that so clearly parallels what Jesus came to do. Yahweh provided a substitute for Isaac; Jesus is the substitute for sinners.

Matthew knew that the people of Israel knew God's promises to Abraham and David. Throughout his Gospel, he presents Jesus as the King who reigns over all things and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

**Three: Jesus came to redeem sinners of every kind.**

Matthew's Gospel mentions four women, three by name – Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth – and one by reputation – the wife of Uriah, whom we know to be Bathsheba. These four were all Gentiles. Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites. Ruth was a Moabite. Bathsheba was almost certainly a Hittite. Three of the women – Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba – were sexually immoral. Yet the Lord God wove them into the history of His Son.

Matthew also mentions fifteen of the twenty-two kings of Israel. Israel had six

godly kings, and Matthew names them all: David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah. Israel had three kings of mixed qualities, and Matthew includes one of them: Solomon. Israel had six bad kings, and Matthew includes four: Rehoboam, Abijah, Joram, and Jeconiah (or Jehoiachin). And Israel had six kings (and one queen, Athaliah) who were truly evil, and Matthew includes four of them: Uzziah, Ahaz, Manasseh, and Amon.

Clearly, God the Father didn't have to arrange a perfect (or nearly perfect) line of ancestors for His Son. Jesus' grandfathers and grandmothers ranged from godly (as godly as a sinner can be, anyway) to reprehensibly evil because He came to save sinners of all kinds, from those who are respectable in the world's eyes to those who are worse than we can imagine.

Jesus came to save sinners, not running screaming from them. He is unashamed to call sinners His brothers (Hebrews 2:11). He ate with tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 9:11); He'll eat with you, too.

What a reminder that we don't know anyone so good that they don't need a Savior or so wicked that they are beyond Jesus' ability to save.

## THREE LESSONS FROM LUKE

*Luke 3:23-38*

One: Luke acknowledges the apparent disgrace of Jesus' conception.

Look at Luke 3:23:

**23** When He began His ministry,  
Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age,  
being, *as was supposed*, the son of Joseph

**(Luke 3:23, 2022 LSB)**

That little phrase, “as was supposed,” tells us the common opinion of Jesus’ birth. Joseph and Mary were betrothed but had not yet been wedded. Betrothal, at that time, was a legally binding relationship. Joseph and Mary were considered husband and wife. It was not like a modern engagement that can be broken off with a phone call. The only way to end a betrothal was by divorce. Jesus was conceived in Mary’s womb by the Holy Spirit, not through normal means of reproduction. But the common view was that He was Joseph’s son and that Joseph and Mary had committed fornication. In John 8, Jesus has a lengthy, tense conversation with the Pharisees. At one point, they say, “We were not born of sexual immorality,” implying that Jesus was illegitimate (John 8:41). It was not until the apostles began preaching in the early church that the truth of Jesus’ conception became known. The Lord Jesus, in His humility, said nothing to alter the opinions of the mocking majority.

**Two: Luke (probably) gives us an unbroken genealogy.**

From Adam to Jesus spans about 4000 years in 78 generations. The 19 generations from Adam to Abraham span about 1900 years. The remaining 59 generations fit very easily into the remaining 2,100 years. I think that it is likely that Luke’s genealogy is unbroken, and gives us Jesus’ exact family tree going back to Adam. Most of these names, especially between David and Jesus, are unknown outside this passage. You see, the incarnation was not God putting on a costume and pretending to be a man for a few years, only to vanish at the end. God personally entered human history to be a part of it and alter it for all time. Jesus Christ will be both God and Man for the rest of eternity.

**Three: Luke deliberately moves backward in time.**

While Matthew begins with Abraham and moves forward in time, Luke begins with Jesus and moves back in time. The last man mentioned by Luke is Adam,

whom God directly created. Luke wants us to understand that a direct line exists between Jesus and Adam, and his wording reflects that. Most of our Bibles have the words “the son of” repeated 77 times. But Luke only used “the son of” once, referring to Jesus being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph. For the remainder of the passage, Luke strung the names together in order: Joseph of Eli or Matthat of Levi of Melchi” and so on, ending with “of Adam of God.”

It might surprise you, but several “Gregory Lawhorns” live in the United States. But only one is descended from Billy, William, Robert, and Lewis: me. I am Gregory of Billy of William of Robert of Lewis. I can’t go back 78 generations, but Luke could and did. He shows that as far as His human nature is concerned, Jesus is as genuinely human as any other man or woman.

## BRINGING IT HOME

What do we take home from Jesus’ genealogies?

**First, Jesus Christ did not pretend to be a man.** His humanity was not a costume. Jesus was the 78<sup>th</sup> generation from Adam, born in a long line of sinners. Some were faithful and godly. Some were wretched and evil. He was not ashamed to be conceived in Mary’s womb, or to be born as a helpless infant, or to grow into adulthood at the same pace as you and I. Jesus was certainly *more* than a man; He was first God, and He remains true God. But He was never *less* than a true man.

**Second, Jesus took on human flesh to save sinners.** Hebrews 2:9 says,

**9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels—  
Jesus,  
because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor,  
so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.  
(Hebrews 2:9, 2022 LSB)**

Hebrews 2:14-15 says,

**14** Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood,  
**He Himself likewise also partook of the same,**  
that through death He might render powerless  
him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,  
**15** and might free those who through fear of death  
were subject to slavery all their lives.  
**(Hebrews 2:14–15, 2022 LSB)**

Jesus became a man to save sinners. He didn't come to condemn the world, John 3:17-18 says, because the world was already condemned by its own sin. Instead, Jesus came to save sinners from the inescapable judgment of God.

We all need to understand something. Our sin is not an obstacle to God's work in creation. Dealing with our sin IS God's work in creation! All creation – stars, planets, mountains, rivers, cocker spaniels, honey badgers, Monarch butterflies, oak trees – exists for a single purpose: God desired to manifest His glory through the justice shown to some sinners and the mercy shown to others. That's what Romans 9:22-24 says.

Jesus didn't become a star or planet. He didn't become a giraffe or a penguin. He didn't become an apple or an oak tree. Jesus became a man, a human being, descended from Adam. Hebrews 2:16 says,

**16** For assuredly He does not give help to angels,  
but He gives help to the seed of Abraham.  
**(Hebrews 2:16, 2022 LSB)**

Don't fallen angels need His help? Oh, without question. They are destined for the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels. But they don't have any help. They have no hope of salvation. They have no Savior. There is no Gospel for them.



But Jesus gives help to the seed of Abraham. Who are the seed of Abraham?  
Not those who share in Abraham's *blood* but those who share in Abraham's *faith*.