

Join us for

Wednesday Night Bible Study



Berea Christian Church

Our Teacher

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Why Are the Genealogies of Matthew and Luke So Different?

Why Are the Genealogies of Matthew and Luke So Different? A Study in Authorial Purpose:

Matthew's Genealogy

The Gospel of Matthew, from its opening chapter, pushes to the forefront the unambiguous link between Jesus and the kingly status of David. In Matthew's genealogy that introduces his Gospel (1:1-17), Jesus is introduced as the culmination of a line of kings and names who had the right to the throne of David.

The most distant ancestor was Abraham, and there were 14 generations from Abraham to David. Another 14 generations marked the line of kings from David to the Babylonian captivity. Then 14 generations to Jesus. Why 14? Perhaps it is because the sum of the numerical value of the letters in David's name is 14.

ΤΙΤ (David) = 4+6+4 = 14

The threefold 14 generations pattern totals 42. Jesus, therefore, is the 42nd generation from Abraham. The total number of kings of Israel and Judah was 42. There seems, then, to be a particular authorial agenda behind numerical theology of $14 \times 3 = 42$ in Matthew. This becomes even more intriguing when one compares Matthew's genealogy with Luke's version.

Luke's genealogy (3:23-38) is quite different from Matthew's, tracing Jesus back to Adam and to God himself ("the son of Adam, the son of God"). In this genealogy, it is David who placed at number 42.

In Matthew's Gospel, David, as a type of Christ, functions as the historical and prophetic pattern for Jesus; whereas Luke simply names David as David, with no title, Matthew pronounces him king: "Jesse was the father of David the king." (1:6) The first line of this Gospel declares Jesus to be the "the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Jesus' adoptive human father is addressed as "Joseph, son of David" (Matt. 1:20).

The blind, the foreigners and the crowd several times call Jesus 'son of David' (Mt. 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9, 15). Matthew's genealogy places Jesus within an Abrahamic and Davidic cycles, universal and particular reign, that connects patriarchal tradition, with Abraham as the father of kings (Genesis 17:6), to the accounts regarding David's reign, drawing upon the books of Ruth (4:18-22) and 1 Chronicles (2:1-15).

Luke's genealogy

Luke's genealogy is notably different. First of all, even Jesus' familial link with Joseph is expressed with some uncertainty (understandably so, since Luke highlights Jesus' virgin conception [1:34-35]):

"And Jesus himself, when he began to teach, was about thirty years of age, **being the son (as was supposed – ἐνομίζετο) of Joseph**, the son of Heli . . . (Luke 3:23)"

There are from 72 to 77 generations (depending on which Greek manuscript you follow) back from Jesus to the originator of the line, God himself:

“. . . who was the son of Seth, who was the son of Adam, who was the son of God. (3:38)”

Counting down the line from Jesus, David appears at #42. (Compare the numerical significance of 42 in Matthew’s genealogy above.)

There is, therefore, a special focus on David in this line, but there are no other kings in Jesus’ ancestry here.

Not only is the line of Judah’s kings missing, but the son of David cited here is not even Solomon. Rather, it is Nathan.

“. . . the son of Mattatha, the son of **Nathan, the son of David**, the son of Jesse (3:31-32).”

And most of us who read this for the first time no doubt wondered the same thing: Who’s he? Where did he come from? What happened to Solomon? Where are the kings descended from David?

There are 20 kings from Rehoboam to Jehoiachin in 1-2 Kings, and Luke has 20 names to fill this gap from Shealtiel down to David. Shealtiel and Zerubbabel appear in Luke’s genealogy and it may be significant that these names are said in 1 Chronicles 3 to be sons of the last king of Judah, Jeconiah/Jehoiachin, who was declared “childless” as far as having any heirs to the throne was concerned (Jeremiah 22:28-30).

So why are the names of Solomon and all his ensuing kings ignored by Luke? Why Nathan?

The mention of Nathan as David’s son raises suspicion that Luke deliberately avoided mentioning the kings responsible for Judah’s fall. Although Solomon is highly praised in narrative of 1 & 2 Kings, he is also criticized for leading Israel astray by marrying foreign women and worshipping their gods (1 Kgs 11:3-8; 2 Kgs 23:13). In Neh. 13:26, his example is used as a warning against the disaster of history repeating itself. What’s worth remembering about Israel’s kings? Nothing, if we follow the accusations expressed in 2 Kings 23’s narrative about Josiah’s reform (cf. v 19 specifically). **This might be the reason for the explicit connection with Nathan, the third of four sons born of Bathsheba to David (cf. 2 Samuel 5:14 and 1 Chronicles 3:5; 14:4), who was not an heir to the Judaeian throne himself, but namesake of the prophet, who pronounced David’s everlasting kingship (2 Sam. 7:11-17).**

Luke appears to be constructing a genealogy that will set Jesus within both the kingly and prophetic roles. By incorporating Nathan, rather than Solomon, in his list, Luke fulfills two purposes – he implies a royal role for Jesus (via Nathan’s connection with David), and, more importantly, he also places him among the prophets.

The Gospel genealogies have such a different appearance because the Gospel writers are employing the two versions of Jesus' familial line to promote different, but complementary, aspects of our Lord's Messianic ministry. Matthew's account presents Him, through Solomon, as having an unquestionable claim to the throne of His father David; Luke presents Jesus as the Prophet-of-prophets who announces, by both word and works of power, the fact that the kingdom of God is at hand! He is the embodiment of both king and kingdom simultaneously.

