

Luke 3:23-38 **The Royal Line**

Family history is something of a fashion today. Whether for personal use or because of heretical religious practices (Mormons), many organizations and businesses devote themselves to helping you trace your ancestry. We take a certain pride in being descended from some significant person, or even an insignificant person involved in something famous (the *Mayflower*). Perhaps it helps us feel an importance that we do not feel otherwise.

Genealogies were important to the nation of Israel as well. The land of Canaan was divided among the twelve tribes on the basis of ancestry (Numbers 26:53-55). Ancestry was used to define the rules for inheritance and kinsmen redemption (Leviticus 25:25). It was also important in taxation (Luke 2:4). It was also the criterion by which eligibility for the priesthood was determined, and without proof of which one was excluded from that office (Ezra 2:61-62). Naturally then, the Jews kept detailed records of genealogies, though they were destroyed during the sack of Jerusalem by Titus in AD 70. No doubt Luke was acquainted with those records.

The Bible relates several genealogies, but I am quite certain they are read by all but the most devoted student of Scripture with a certain lack of enthusiasm. It can be difficult to find personal relevance in a long list of names that we can barely pronounce. But nonetheless, Genesis 4:16-22; 5:1-32; 10:1-32; 11:10-29; and 1 Chronicles 1-9 are a part of Scripture and, if 2 Timothy 3:16 is true, then they must have been intended by God to be “profitable.”

Differences between Matthew and Luke

To begin we must address the obvious differences between the two genealogies related to the birth of Jesus.

Luke’s account is longer - it contains seventy-seven names whereas Matthew’s account contains only forty-two names which are grouped into three groups of fourteen each (perhaps for ease of memorization).

Luke’s account includes no women; Matthew's account includes five (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary).

Luke begins his account with the present and goes backward in time to God; Matthew begins with Abraham and brings the genealogy forward in time to the present.

In his gospel, Luke places the genealogy at the time when Jesus is about to begin his ministry. Matthew places his account at the beginning of his gospel just prior to the birth of Christ.

These differences can, in part, be explained by the respective audiences for which each author was writing, and for the larger point of the gospel narrative itself. Luke is writing specifically to a Gentile, and his gospel focuses on Jesus as the universal Savior of humankind. Therefore, it is not surprising that he took Christ’s ancestry back to Adam (even God, Himself). Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience, and therefore quite naturally he presents Jesus in the family line of David and Abraham as the long-awaited Messiah of the Jews.

This also explains why the lists are so different. As the Jewish Messiah, Matthew’s intent is to show Jesus to have been of the line of David and therefore traces His ancestry through Joseph. Jesus must be

presented as having a legal claim to the throne of David. Luke presents Jesus as the Son of God, and therefore omits Joseph “being supposedly the son of Joseph” (v.23) and relates Christ’s ancestry through Mary. The fact that Mary’s name is not mentioned is simply because of Luke’s deference to Jewish custom. Luke traces His origin back to God to echo the words pronounced at Christ’s baptism “Thou art My beloved Son” Luke 3:22.

Therefore, since the authors have different purposes in writing their respective narrative, and since they are writing to different audiences, they used different branches of the family tree. Matthew traces his genealogy through Joseph, Luke through Mary.

A word about words. In Matthew’s account, the phrase “was born” is used - “to Jesse was born David” in Matthew 1:6 for example. The Greek word translated “was born” is *gennaō* which means “to generate” or “to produce” and does not literally mean “father” but can mean “ancestor” as we would use the term. In Luke’s gospel, “the son” is used frequently - “the son of Matthat, the son of Levi” (v.24). This word does not actually appear in the Greek text, but is inferred from context. That is, names are paired and the relationship between them implied. For example, we would not consider Adam to be literally the son of God in the same way Noah was the son of Lamech (v. 36, 38).

Some conclusions to draw. First that not all ancestors are listed ought to remind us not to quibble too closely about what is not in Scripture. If God had wanted all of the ancestors listed, they would have been. More importantly, taking the two accounts together we see the reality of His human nature and the certainty of His being the Messiah.

The Timing of the Start of Christ's Ministry

“When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age” (v.23). This is no mere trivia Luke records, but a relevant fact of Jewish life. While there is nothing magical about the number, thirty was the typical age at which Jewish men of God began their ministry. For example, Joseph was thirty when he became a ruler in Egypt (Genesis 41:46), David was thirty when he became king of Israel (2 Samuel 5:4), and Ezekiel was thirty when he saw visions of God (Ezekiel 1:1). Perhaps more importantly, thirty was also the age at which a priest became eligible to serve (Numbers 4:3). We are to remember that Jesus came not “to abolish, but to fulfil” the Law (Matthew 5:17).

Four Significant Names

First, Jesus is the “son of David” (v.31). The angel had already revealed this to Mary “and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever,” Luke 1:31. After he had solidified his rule over Israel, David related to the prophet Nathan his desire to build a great house for the Lord. After at first giving his approval, Nathan was told by God to tell David that the Lord had no need of such a house. Instead, the Lord would establish the house of David forever, “And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16). This was fulfilled in the short term by the accession of Solomon, but after his reign the kingdom divided. Thus the ultimate fulfillment was to be found in the long-awaited Messiah.

Second, Jesus is the “son of Abraham” (v.34). He is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. After Abram and Lot had separated, the Lord promised Abram “for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and your descendants forever” (Genesis 13:15). This covenant was reaffirmed after Abraham had

been called upon by God to sacrifice Isaac, “And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” (Genesis 22:18). This was understood by all believing Jews to be fulfilled at the coming of the Messiah. Paul, a very devoted Pharisee, taught as much. Galatians 3:16, “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ.”

Third, Jesus is the “son of Adam” (v. 38). Jesus was fully human.

He was born as a human baby (Luke 2:6-7), and He grew and developed as a human naturally would (Luke 2:40, 52).

He had a human body subject to human weaknesses -- he became tired when He traveled through Samaria and needed to rest at a well (John 4:6). He became thirsty while suffering on the cross (John 19:28). He was hungry after He had fasted (Matthew 4:2). He was weak, so that another had to help Him carry His cross (Luke 23:26). And, of course, His body eventually broke down and died (Luke 23:46).

He had a human mind that “increased in wisdom” (Luke 2:52).

He had human emotions. He was distressed when He pondered His crucifixion (John 12:27). He was amazed at the faith of a Roman soldier (Matthew 8:10). He was sorrowful at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35).

Those who had known Him the longest saw Him as only a man, Matthew 13:54-56, “⁵⁴He came to His hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? ⁵⁵Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?’”

This is important for two reasons. First, Christ can be our High Priest according to Hebrews 4:15, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” Second, only as a man could Christ be a substitute for us in His sacrifice. Hebrews 2:17, “Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” Mankind had sinned, and mankind had to pay the price. Christ had to be like us in every way, sin only excepted, in order to meet that requirement.

Finally, Jesus is the “Son of God” (v.38).

He is referred to as God throughout Scripture (John 1:1, 1:18, 20:28, Romans 9:5, Titus 2:13, 2 Peter 1:1).

Jesus made claims to deity, “Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.’” (John 8:58). In case one wonders if this was a cryptic answer intended to be misunderstood, clearly the response of those around indicates that it was not, “Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him” (John 8:59).

Jesus possessed attributes of deity. He demonstrated omnipotence when He calmed the storm (Matthew 8:24-26), changed water into wine (John 2:1-11), and miraculously increased available food (Matthew 14:19-21). Such power over nature can only be exerted by a Creator, not a creature. He asserted His eternity (John 8:58). He showed He was omniscient in that he knew what people were thinking, “immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, ‘Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?’” (Mark 2:8), and knowing who

would betray Him, “Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him” (John 6:64). That this was not simply extraordinary knowledge or a special revelation from God as might be given to a prophet is clear because those who knew Him best said “Now we know that You know all things” John 16:30.

Jesus acted upon the prerogatives of deity. He possessed sovereignty, as indicated by the “you have heard. . . but I say” passages in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). He forgave the sins of the paralytic (Matthew 9:2) and the woman who washed His feet (Luke 7:47). Very significantly, Jesus accepted worship, “And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, ‘You are certainly God’s Son!’” (Matthew 14:33), and “But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, ‘Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!’” (Luke 5:8). Jewish Law clearly stated that only God was to be worshipped, so for Jesus to accept worship would be blasphemy if He were not truly God.

He is the son of God in essence, “although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,” Philippians 2:6. He is the son of God in His deity, “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” Colossians 2:9.

Take Aways

Let us appreciate all the passages of Scripture and recognize that they are all inspired by God for our benefit.

Let us recognize, even if we cannot fully understand, the sublime fact that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic promises, and the Savior of all who receive faith.