

## 3. The Genealogy

The two genealogies of our Lord present a knotty problem. They have long been a puzzle to critics and exegetes. Both purport to be Joseph's.

"And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ"—Matt.1:16.

"And Jesus himself...being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli"—Luke 3:23.

With regard to the generations between Abraham and David the two documents, except for slight variations in spelling are in perfect accord. From David onward, however, they are contradictory and mutually exclusive—as is clear at a glance.

There is no need to enlarge upon the explanations that have been given of this phenomenon. Here are some in brief outline:--

1. From the early centuries of our era the discrepancy has been explained by some expositors on the ground that one genealogy was transcribed from *temple* records, the other copied from *official* documents stored in the archives. The suggestion brings no relief: for manifestly one of the two records was a *duplicate* of the other.

This view would satisfactorily account for a few slight inaccuracies; but when in tracing the ancestry between David and Joseph the two lists have only two names in common (Shealtiel and Zerubbabel) and the number of generations is *twenty-five* according to one and *forty-one* according to the other, the hypothesis fails, and must be held to exemplify an unsound interpretation.

2. A view more widely held is that in Matthew we have the genealogy of Joseph, and in Luke Mary's. This explanation founds itself on the supposition that, since Luke does not say that Heli *begat* Joseph, Joseph was the son-in-law of Heli, and called "son of Heli" because espoused to Heli's daughter.

This view is an assumption rather than a deduction from the facts. It strains the sense of "son," and unjustifiably disregards the context. A true explanation will have regard to the Greek words in their simplicity, and will not force upon them significations repugnant to the context. A theory that fails along either of these lines proclaims its insufficiency to solve the problem.

The Hebrew usages of "son" need not be discussed: they have no bearing on this case. The real question is, What is the meaning here? is its import defined in the document itself? The opening sentence of the genealogy furnishes explicit answer to this.

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

Obviously, Luke means that Christ's contemporaries supposed Him to be Joseph's *own son*\*: for none ever supposed our Lord to have been Joseph's *son-in-law*!

\* Mark 6:3 is conclusive as to this. They said: "Is not this the carpenter, the *son* of Mary, and *brother* of James and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? are not his *sisters* here with us."

Moreover, "son" appears (in the Greek) in the genealogy but once—"Jesus...(as was supposed) the son of

Joseph"—it is omitted before the other names, the omission, or ellipsis, implying repetition. Hence, it has been rightly supplied by the translators. Now, the sense of "son" having been defined at the beginning of the pedigree, and not being repeated before the other names, must be supplied with a uniform meaning.

The omission of the formula "begat" in Luke would not have been advanced in support of the son-in-law theory if the *form* of the genealogy had been borne in mind. Luke's genealogy, unlike Matthew's, moves *backwards*, from Christ to Adam, from son to father. Such arrangement makes the usage of the formula impossible for the reason that sons can not beget their fathers. Furthermore, it goes without saying that genealogies run from father to son. Nobody ever heard of such a thing as a genealogy of sons-in-law!

But, even if the theory was tenable, it fails to extricate the tangle. There is another question involved. Matthew affixes to his genealogy a statement showing that it has been constructed according to a definite numerical scheme.

"So all the generations from Abraham unto David are *fourteen* generations; and from David unto the carrying away to Babylon *fourteen* generations; and from the carrying away to Babylon unto the Christ *fourteen* generations" (Matt.1:17).

The first two cycles conform to the scheme; in the third, however, the number of generations (including Christ) is only *thirteen*.\*

\* The attempt to bring the number of generations in the last cycle to the required number by reckoning Mary as a "generation" deserves no notice. Husband and wife belong to the *same* generation. God's Word stands in no need of such desperate measures to maintain its veracity, and theology can neither command respect nor win confidence by resorting to such fabrications.

Yet, in view of the confusion that has enveloped the entire subject, it is not surprising that even such puerile "explanation" should have enjoyed a considerable vogue among expositors.

These two views—not the only ones, but such as have been most generally held—are "explanations" that do not explain. Hence we must push our investigation along different lines.

Before attempting a solution, two things must be borne in mind:--

1. We must resign ourselves to the fact that the text of Scripture has suffered through centuries of transmission. We do not have the autographs, hence we lack a perfect text. The Massoretes and their predecessors transformed the Hebrew characters from the Phoenician to the so-called "Assyrian;" they modified the spelling by introducing the quiescent letters; and then they stereotyped upon the text such a sense as they approved by placing the points and accents. Their work has tended to reduce the Hebrew of the Old Testament to one common style. Their pointing is often the result of misapprehension or faulty treatment: it represents the individual preferences of the editors or the preferences of the schools to which they belonged. In other words, by the labors of Sopherim and Massoretes, the text has from time to time been subjected to a process of rejuvenation in order that its meanings might be rendered as clear as possible. There was no intention of introducing disorder into the text—only a purpose to reduce the spelling to a form which was believed to be right, in the spirit of Ezra, who was desirous that the people "should understand the reading" (Neh.8:8). In fine, the Massoretic text is a copy which, having undergone repeated revision, presents an appearance very different from the primitive text, having, in the last instance, been edited centuries after the loss of all traditional contact with the events recorded—long after the fall of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish people among the nations. In some cases the primitive reading is transparent, in others it defies detection. And if the Hebrew text has suffered in spite of the jealous care and laborious efforts to lose nothing and prevent error, what shall be said of the Greek manuscripts which have long been at the mercy of irresponsible copyists? Tertullian's treatise charging the Valentinians with having

modified the text of John 1:13\* to suit their doctrine, illustrates the experiences through which the manuscripts have passed.

\* *Vide*, Dr. J. Orr, "Virgin Birth," Ap.viii, p.269.

2. God's Word is perfect as a whole and in its parts. Part hangs together with part in perfect balance. As originally given, each word fitted snugly into its place, as a gem in its ouch, and contributed its share towards the perfection of the scene described or the subject unfolded. Needless to add, each word blended harmoniously with the main drift of thought. Hence, whenever the harmony and cadence is disturbed, we may well suspect that the primitive reading has been covered over, obliterated. Efforts to restore it must take into account—(a) the variant readings, (b) the context, (c) other Scriptures bearing on the subject, (d) correlated facts.

The opening sentence of Matthew suggests an avenue for our research. "The book of the generations of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

On the face of things, we have here the genealogy of a king of the house of David. This being so, an examination of the official records of the kings of Judah—the books of the Kings and Chronicles—is sure to yield data that will throw light on the subject.

The Kings and Chronicles exhibit a striking feature: at the commencement and close of each reign we meet a stereotyped formula:

"And...slept with his fathers, and was buried in...:  
and...his son reigned in his stead."

"...began to reign when he was...years old; and he  
reigned...years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was...the  
daughter of...."

The last formula suggests the solution of the difficulty. The name of the king's mother appears together with that of her father.\* It is therefore reasonable to expect that, in the genealogy of the Messiah, as in the case of His predecessors, the name of His mother's father should appear alongside of hers. Hence we deem the primitive reading of v.16 to have been as follows:

"And Jacob begat Joseph the *father* of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."

\* See 1 Kings 14:21,31 and 2 Chron.12:13; 1 Kings 15:1 and 2 Chron.13:1; 1 Kings 15:8; 1 Kings 22:42 and 2 Chron.20:31; 2 Kings 8:26 and 2 Chron.22:2; 2 Kings 12:1 and 2 Chron.24:2; 2 Kings 14:1 and 2 Chron.25:1; 2 Kings 15:2 and 2 Chron.26:3; 2 Kings 15:33 and 2 Chron.27:1; 2 Kings 18:2 and 2 Chron.29:1; 2 Kings 21:1,19; 22:1; 23:31,36; 24:8,18. Jehoram and Ahaz are the only kings whose mother's name is not given.

This emendation harmonizes the genealogy with the historical records of the kings of Judah; it brings the number of generations in the third cycle up to *fourteen*, and thus conforms the document with the numerical structure claimed for it; it explains the discrepancy between Matthew and Luke without fastening arbitrary or speculative senses upon the words.

It may be asked—if Matthew wrote *patros*, how came *andros* in the text? We reply, that transmission and Tertullian's charge against the Valentinians account for all we find. Let it be borne in mind that antichristian cults have ever sought to accredit themselves by claiming to derive their tenets from Scripture. Hence it would come about, in the early days of our era, that exponents of doctrines antagonistic to Christianity

would seek to accommodate the Scriptures to their views. *First*, a passage referring to the manner in which our Lord became flesh (John 1:13) would be so worded as to refer to believers. *Second*, the incarnation would be disparaged and His Messianism discredited by altering the pedigree. Surely, it is far easier to believe that the text became corrupted, through carelessness of copyists or otherwise, than to admit—as we are forced to do accepting the genealogy in its present form—that Matthew should fail to comply with the numerical scheme on which he avows his genealogy to be constructed.

And now we may pass on to consider another point. Both Mary and her husband belonged to the house of David. Mary was in the reigning line, reckoning her descent from Solomon; Joseph was in the second line, reckoning his descent from Nathan the son of David. The question is often raised, whence does Christ derive His title to David's throne? Not from Joseph: for, though he was Mary's husband, Christ was *not* his son. Not from Mary: for though a descendant of David and Solomon, yet kings derive the title to the throne from their *fathers*.

The answer is, the terms of the Davidic covenant settle the question. We read: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (2 Sam.7:14). The sense in which these words applied to Solomon need not detain us. Whatever their primary intention, the quotation in Heb.1:5 proves that they were exhausted in Christ. The covenant-promise makes it clear that the title of the "seed" to the throne of his royal ancestor is derived not merely through blood descent, but also in virtue of Divine sonship.

It is for this reason—a reason generally overlooked by expositors—that the two Gospels which lay special emphasis on His connection with David's throne lay such strong stress on His virgin birth.

The first chapter of Matthew is in two parts: the *genealogy* (vv.1-17), the *nativity* (vv.18-25). Each section has a headline:--

"The book of the *generation* of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham," v.1.

"The *generation* of Jesus Christ was on this wise," v.18a.

By rendering the same Greek word "generation" in v.1, and "birth" in v.18, our versions have obscured the actual intent of the introductory chapter.

A uniform translation of the word in both places brings out the fact that the "generation" of Jesus Christ is presented in two distinct aspects. Vss.2-17 proclaim His *Davidic descent*; vss.18-25 assert His *Divine sonship*, and that in a most categorical fashion. Exclusion of the sexual element is affirmed twice (vss.18 and 25); His conception through the agency of the Holy Spirit is also affirmed twice (vss.19 and 20); His birth from a virgin mother is stated once (v.23). And all this is shown to be in fulfillment of "what the Lord has spoken through the prophet."

A cursory survey of the Gospel with this thought in mind will suffice to show its prominence. The Divine Sonship of Israel's King is proven by reference to the Prophets (2:15); proclaimed by a voice from heaven (3:17), disputed by Satan (4:3,6), testified by demons (8:29). Later on, it is confessed by the disciples (16:16) and asserted for the second time by a voice from heaven (17:5). At a later stage, He confronts the rulers with the question, "What think ye of Christ? whose son is He?" (22:41). When they answer "of David," He urges upon them the Divine Sonship: "How then, doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying:

The Lord said unto my Lord,  
Sit thou on my right hand,  
Till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet?

If David, then, calleth Him Lord, how is He his son?" (Matt.22:43-45). The crucial question at the trial is—"Tell us whether Thou be the Son of God" (26:63)? For answering the question in the affirmative He is crucified and jeered by the crowd. "If Thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross" (27:40). Lastly, the centurion and they that were with him feared exceedingly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God" (27:54).

In Luke's Gospel, His Divine Sonship is announced in connection with the promise "the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:30-35). To appreciate the force of Gabriel's declaration to Mary, we will consider his words in the light of an ancient oracle.

"How long wilt thou go hither and thither, O thou backsliding daughter? for the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth. A woman shall encompass a man" (Jer.31:22).

"A woman shall encompass a man." This is the method of procreation, a matter of everyday experience. Wherein lies the *newness*? *In the fact that the encompassing of a man by a woman is the result of God's creative act.* This is the point on which Gabriel's announcement turns.

He said: "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name Jesus" (Luke 1:31). Many a daughter in Israel had received similar news from angelic visitors. But here is the point raised by Mary: "How shall this be, *seeing I know not a man*" (Luke 1:34)? The angel answers: "*The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall over-shadow thee: WHEREFORE* also that which is to be born shall be holy, the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Though a woman-born, our Lord was not begotten by man, as are we, but by God, hence the distinctive designation "the *only* begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). From His mother our Lord derived His Davidic descent. The son of a daughter of Judah's royal house, He was truly "born of the seed of David" (Rom.1:3; 2 Tim.2:8). From God His Father He derived the title to the throne of Israel (Luke 1:32).

With Joseph, the husband of Mary, gone from the genealogy of Matthew, the only remaining difficulty is the omission of three kings between Joram and Uzziah. To discuss the problem now would require more space than is at present available. So we must leave it for future consideration. Meanwhile, enough has been said to furnish food for reflection to all who seek to occupy themselves in heart and mind with David's Son and David's Lord.

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