

JESUS GENEALOGIES

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There have been many different kinds of assertions made regarding the differences in the genealogies of our Lord as per Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-38. Likewise, various interpretations have been given regarding the differences. We want to highlight a few.

THE CONTRADICTION THEORY

Some have leveled the charge that this is a blatant contradiction¹ that “Matthew and/or Luke somehow goofed and that we, therefore, cannot trust the New Testament because Matthew cannot get it right even in the first chapter, etc., etc.

Of course, we may ask, “How could Joseph be the son of “Heli” and “Jacob?” Admittedly, such is hard to explain at first. *Apparent* discrepancies such as this do exist in the Bible, which this writer is convinced, are to be used by the wicked to further their rebellion against God. However, those who love the truth consider things more soberly.

Proverbs 18:17, “The first one to plead his cause seems right, Until his neighbor comes and examines him.”

Likewise, these dissimilarities present to those who seek to remain true to the inerrancy of the Scripture peculiar challenges to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). These dissimilarities also rule out the notion that there was a strict conspiracy of the early writers regarding the life of Christ.

It is obvious that the *Contradiction Theory* is based on prejudice rather than intellect for these reasons:

- These genealogies were accepted by those in whose times they were written or they would have been discarded as fraudulent along with the many other pseudo-pigrapha books.² These folks obviously were privy to some kind of information that is not available today in a clear form.

¹ www.infidels.org

² Like the “Gospel of Thomas” etc.

- In actuality, the two apparent different genealogies strengthen the overall case of the New Testament. If the New Testament books were put together by collusion behind closed doors, then we might expect every detail to be identical in their accounts of Jesus. No apparent discrepancies would have been permitted. But since such is not the case, and differences do exist, we are left with only two choices. One, the so-called conspirators were of the worst kind of liars who could not correctly dot an "i" or cross a "t," yet were successful in selling it to the entire world throughout the ages. It becomes too fantastic to believe that liars, who seem on every account to be upright and reasonable individuals, would work deceitfully in fabricating these genealogies, the virgin birth, and the resurrection, yet demand honesty and integrity from their readers? Such makes no sense.

The second choice is that a reasonable explanation, known or unknown, exists to reconcile the accounts. The latter is preferred since there cannot be a higher standard of morality preached and pressed from than what is found in the New Testament. Their credibility as honest and capable men is evident. The highly educated Saul of Tarsus was a well-known skeptic and adversary to Christ. Yet, because of some volume of evidence, he made a complete and diametrical change. Many of the apostles were humble fishermen, not sly deviants. Luke was a doctor. Their credibility cannot easily be dismissed by the rational mind.

- There are explanations that better explain the differences in the two gospels other than "a contradiction!"

THE BROTHERS THEORY

This theory has two possibilities. One plausible suggestion is that Heli and Jacob were *brothers*. Jacob was Joseph's biological father. When Jacob died, his wife married Heli who became Joseph's legal father. When you compare the names that Matthew and Luke designate to Heli and Jacob's father, respectively, it may be in fact the same person. Luke says,

"²³ Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli, ²⁴ the son of **Matthat**, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Janna, the son of Joseph" (Luke 3:23, 24)³

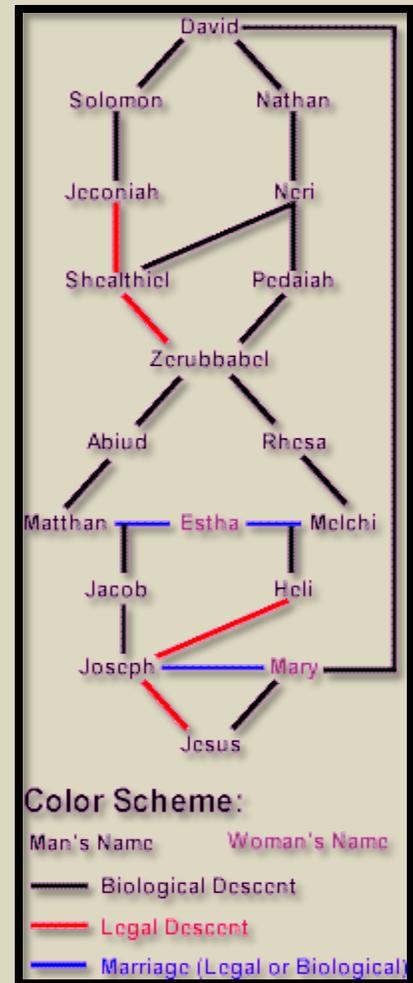
³ All verses are taken from the New King James Version © 1982

Matthew records,

“¹⁵ Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot **Matthan**, and Matthan begot Jacob. ¹⁶ And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.

So perhaps “Matthat” is an alternate for “Matthan” and Heli and Jacob were brothers. Yet the weakness of this position follows in the comparison of ancestral lines prior to Matthan (Matthew’s account) and Matthat (Luke’s account).

The second possibility adds a different spin yet may have more merit than the first. It suggests that Matthan (Joseph’s grandfather) married and begat Jacob, who later begat Joseph through his brother Heli’s widow. This theory goes on to say that when Matthan died, his widow (Joseph’s grandmother) married a close relative named Melchi (see Luke’s account) from which Heli was eventually born. This would make Heli and Jacob half-brothers. Heli married but only to die childless. This obligated Jacob to marry Heli’s widow, and he fathered Joseph⁴. Finally, this makes Jacob the biological father of Joseph, but since he was to raise up offspring for his brother, Heli was Joseph’s *legal* father. There is some external evidence that is made in favor of this as the following web site shows www.cin.org.⁵



ALTERNATIVE NAMES THEORY

Is it possible that “Heli” and “Jacob” were, in fact, the same person? Several Bible characters are called by different names. Matthew was called “Levi,” Saul was called “Paul,” etc. If one subscribes to this theory, then one would have to insist that many of the other names in the two accounts would have to be alternates for the same person as well. It is *possible*, but likely not *probable*.

⁴ Deuteronomy 25:5, 6 “If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband’s brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. ⁶ And it shall be that the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.”

⁵ Image is from this site: http://www.cin.org/users/james/files/Genealogies_of_Christ.htm

FATHER AND HUSBAND NAMED "JOSEPH" (in Matthew's account)

This position asserts that Mary was married to "Joseph" and had a father named "Joseph." This position contends that Matthew's account is therefore through Mary's father, Joseph while Luke's account is through Mary's husband, Joseph. This would account for the different names. Joseph is called her "*aner*" in the Greek which can simply mean "male."

However, this argument seems forced and unnatural. "*Aner*" often means *husband*. When it is used in conjunction with a specific woman (i.e., her man) it means *husband* (cf. Lk. 16:18; Jn. 4:16, 17; Acts 5:9, 10; 1 Cor. 7:16, 39; etc.). Matthew doesn't inform us of two Josephs but simply says that Joseph was Mary's husband (1:16, 19)

LUKE THROUGH MARY; MATTHEW THROUGH JOSEPH

("HELI" IS MARY'S FATHER, JACOB IS JOSEPH'S FATHER)

This approach along with the first theory seems to be the best. Matthew gives a legal genealogy through Joseph, Jesus' *legal* father. Luke gives a genealogy through "the flesh." One might ask, "Why does Luke's account read as if Joseph is Heli's son? That is a good question with a simple answer. Joseph could have been considered Heli's son through marriage to Mary. There is a precedence of a man named "Jair" who is *from the tribe of Judah*. His father was Segub, and his grandfather was Hezron (1 Chron. 2:21-22). Jair's biological ancestry looks like this:

JUDAH → Perez → Hezron → Segub → Jair

However, Scripture often refers to Manasseh as Jair's father (Num. 32:41; Deut. 3:14; 1 Kin. 4:13). He was adopted into the tribe of Manasseh because his grandfather, Hezron, had Segub, through *Machir's daughter*.

Machir was Manasseh's son; Manasseh was Joseph's son (Gen. 50:23). While Jair was from the tribe of Judah he was also adopted into the tribe of Manasseh through his grandmother's side of the family! Hence Manasseh begot Machir who begot Jair's grandmother who begot Segub, Jair's father.

MANASSEH → Machir → Machir's Daughter → Segub → Jair

Now if Jair could be referred to as Manasseh's "son," why cannot Joseph also be Heli's "son" through marriage? Coupled with this is the probability that Mary had no brothers. She has a sister who is alluded to in John 19:25. Jesus' response in John 19:26, 27, indicates that Mary had no one to take care of her. If such were the case, then the daughter would receive the inheritance of the father (cf. Num. 27:8). The only stipulation is that she must marry from within her own tribe (Num. 36:6, 7). Mary would have met

the latter qualification as well since her husband was a Judean, of the house of David (Luke 1:27). Mary was likewise from the house of David as Paul clearly teaches that Jesus was from the seed of David "according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3). The phrase, "of the flesh" certainly refers to Mary's lineage.

The point of this article is to show that there are reasonable explanations for the differing names in the genealogies. The variation of names and details in the gospel accounts only strengthens the credibility of these writings. Only the "willfully ignorant" are quick to cry "contradiction" when in fact there is none. Some things simply take diligent research to work through. This is the nature that the Bible calls upon its readers to take.

- Ecclesiastes 1:13, "And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised."
- Jeremiah 29:13, "And you will seek Me and find [Me], when you search for Me with all your heart."

In the journey to discover the truth, the honest and diligent truth-seeker will uncover hidden "gems" in those very things' skeptics call out as *inconsistencies*.