Christ, Jesus, 04: Genealogy of

Matthew and Luke in their Gospels have given us the genealogy of Christ differently, and many suppose that they contradict each other. Since as a consequence every believer, in ignorance of the truth, has been zealous to invent some explanation to explain these passages. (Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 1.7.1)

Early Christian commentators have put forth interpretative strategies to harmonize the two very different accounts of Jesus' genealogy. Conversely, modern exegesis sees each genealogy as a theological and literary construct that serves specific purposes in Matthew and Luke's Gospels:

1. Jesus' genealogy in Matthew;
2. Jesus' genealogy in Luke;
3. Discrepancies between Matthew and Luke, and;
4. Historiography.

Jesus' Genealogy in Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew (→ Matthew, Gospel of) organizes Jesus' genealogy in three ways: a title (Matt 1:1), a linear genealogy (Matt 1:2–16), and a summary of this genealogy (Matt 1:17). The first verse can be understood as a condensed genealogy of Jesus, son of → David, son of → Abraham. While Abraham ends this genealogical outline, he is the starting point of the genealogical list that follows (Matt 1:2–16) and leads up to Jesus Christ (→ Christ, Jesus, 01: Survey). The pattern of this genealogy is x "fathered" (ἐγέννησεν) y. Verse 17 acts as a summary that orders the preceding genealogy in three of 14 generations from Abraham to David, from David to the → deportation, and from the deportation to Christ.

This linear genealogy follows a line of ancestors that guides readers to a single descendant without noting the other possible sibling branches of each generation. Linear genealogies often had a legitimation function (Johnson, 1969, 77–82; Wilson, 1977). For example, → Flavius Josephus' autobiography (*Vita*; → Autobiography) starts with a list of ancestors to prove his royal affinities.

Matthew's complex genealogy has many noteworthy features: five women are mentioned, some kings are omitted, the last third of the genealogy does not refer to known biblical characters, verse 16 marks a discontinuity between the genealogy and Jesus, and the number of generations in verse 17 does not correspond to the preceding list.

Why does Matthew's genealogy mention Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah? Church fathers such as → John Chrysostom (*Hom. Matt.* 1.14; 3.3), → John Cassian (*Con.* 2.17.17), → Jerome (*Comm. Matt.* 1.1.3), and → Severus of Antioch (*Hom. cath.* 94) present these women in negative ways to highlight the → salvation brought forth from Jesus. Modern exegesis argues against this misogynist interpretation and even understands these women as examples of different virtues (Warner, 2005; Clements, 2014). Many exegetes consider them as foreigners that show universal salvation (Luz, 2007, 83–85; Hakh, 2014). It is also proposed that they had sexual unions outside the norms that ultimately allowed → Israel's destiny to take shape (Davies & Allison, 1988, 170–172; Brown, 1993, 73–74).

Matthew's genealogy follows Judah's rulers such as transmitted in the books of Chronicles. However, it omits three kings following Joram: Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah (1 Chron 3:11–12). → Hilary of Poitiers (*Comm. Matt.* 1.3) suggests that this omission is explained by a three-generation curse on Joram for having married a foreign woman. Jerome (*Comm. Matt.* 1.1.8–9) understands this omission as a way of taking Jezebel out of the lineage. This omission is necessary for the numerical scheme that the author wants to impose on the list of kings (Carlson, 2014). Matthew also omits a generation between Josiah and Jeconiah (Matt 1:11) and mentions Jeconiah's brothers (plural) even if he only has one (Nolland, 1997; Hood, 2011; Bryan, 2019). Of the third part of the genealogy, only Shealtiel and Zerubbabel are known.

Verse 16 brakes with the pattern. Joseph is designated as the husband of → Mary of whom is begotten Jesus. Unlike the other men in the genealogy, Joseph is not identified as a father, but as a husband. The passive form of the verb can be a way to indicate that God is at the origin of this action (Viviano, 2010, 341). The different formulation used to present Jesus' relation to his parents brings questions that are addressed in the narrative about Joseph's dilemma (Matt 1:18–25; Danes, 2004). Early commentators saw the discontinuity between a genealogy that leads to

Joseph and Jesus who is not described as his son. Jerome (*Comm. Matt.* 1.1.18) asks: "Since Joseph is not the father of the Lord and Savior, how does the sequence of the genealogy pertain to the Lord?" His answer is the same as Chrysostom's (*Hom. Matt.* 2): Mary and Joseph are both of Davidic descent from the same tribe. Modern exegetes tend to understand that Joseph adopts Jesus by naming him (Matt 1:21) or by inviting his pregnant mother in his house or taking care of him in chapter 2 (Glessner, 2014).

At first glance, the arrangement underlined by the narrator's summary in verse 17 gives the impression that the birth of Jesus is the pinnacle of Israel's history. This verse divides the genealogy into three sections of 14 generations. However, this number of generations cannot be reconciled with what precedes (Hagner, 1993, 5). Early commentators like Hilary (*Comm. Matt.* 1.2) had already noticed this problem: "It is written that there are fourteen generations until Mary, and thirteen are found in counting." Many solutions have been proposed for this *crux interpretum* ("difficult to interpret"): there was a mistake or an approximation (Luz, 2007, 85); counting David twice (Carlson, 2014; Zacharias, 2017, 4244), counting Jeconiah twice (Jer. *Comm. Matt.* 1.12; *Op. Imp. Matt.* 1.12; Brown, 1993, 83–84), or counting the deportation to Babylon as a generation (Hil. Poit. *Comm. Matt.* 1.1.2–3, Chrys. *Hom. Matt.* 4). Another common strategy is to propose a reasoning underlying to the numerical patterns of 3, 7, 14, 40, or 42 that can be seen in Matthew's genealogy. A prevalent example is to explain number 14 by gematria of David's name in Hebrew. S. Doane (2020) describes a complete list of interpretive hypothesis and describes the genealogy as a puzzling reading experience.

Matthew's genealogy shows that Jesus is the son of foreign women, unknown people, and good and evil kings. This genealogy is certainly royal, but at the same time, it is in tension with the way in which power was exercised by royalty in Israel and by the Roman Empire. Matt 1:1–17, with its emphasis on David's crime (Matt 1:6) and on the Babylonian exile, subverts Davidic messianism by revisiting Jewish history to propose Jesus as a messiah both from David and different from him. J.M. Jones (1994) claims that Jesus becomes the antitype of David. C. Fuller (2007) goes so far as to say that it is a parody of what was expected of genealogies.

Matthew's Gospel starts with a very Jewish genealogy and ends with a call to go to all nations (Matt 28). A genealogy that begins with Abraham, names most of Judah's kings and highlights foreign women in David's lineage, seems to be a perfect fit for a Jewish audience in the process of opening itself to be more inclusive.

Jesus' Genealogy in Luke

Luke's version (→ Luke, Gospel of) of Jesus' genealogy (Luke 3:23–38) is set between the → baptism (Luke 3:21–22) and → temptation narratives (Luke 4:1–13). It starts with Jesus and goes back all the way to → Adam, and God through a list of 77 names. The uninterrupted pattern of this genealogy is x "of" (τοῦ) y, indicating that one man originates from another using only the article in the genitive form. Unlike most biblical genealogies, Luke proposes an ascending genealogy that goes back in time (Tobit 1:1 is another example). This patrilineal genealogy is only interested in the male ancestors of Jesus. It ultimately reaches Adam and God. This ending is enigmatic since the link between Adam and God is mentioned in the same way as all of the other preceding genealogical connections. It gives a universal and all-encompassing reach to Jesus' ancestral list. Universality of the gospel is an important theme of Luke (Bovon, 1988, 244–251). Since this genealogy links Jesus to God by Adam, he has divine origins. Nevertheless, all humanity shares this attribute.

Most of the names until Nathan (Luke 3:24–31) are unknown. The names from David to Abraham (Luke 3:31–34) come from 1 Chron 1–3 and Ruth 4, the ones from Abraham to Sem (Luke 3:34–38) originate from Gen 11, and those of Sem to Adam in Gen 5.

David is the only king (Luke 3:31) mentioned in this version of Jesus' forefathers. No women or annotations are included. No title or summary divides this list into groups. The link to David is made by one of his lesser-known sons, Nathan, his fourth son born to Bathseba (2 Sam 5:14; 1 Chr 3:5; 14:4; Zech 12:12). This avoids all the kings of Judah and their failings that ultimately lead to the exil.

The list contains some interesting features. For example, there are as many as six versions of what can be seen as the same name: Mathtat (v. 24),

Mattathiah (v. 25), Maath (v. 26), Mattathiah (v. 26), Maththat (v. 29), and Mattatha (v. 31). It also has two similar sequences: Jesus, Eliezer, Jorim, Maththat, and Levi (Luke 3:29) and Jesus, Joseph, Eli, Maththat, and Levi (Luke 3:23–24).

If we do not count God, Luke's genealogy covers 77 generations. → Augustine of Hippo (*Cons.* 2.4.12) explains the 77 names as a symbol of thorough remission of all sins. Luke's Gospel does not regroup these in an explicit numerical pattern; however, typically, readers have seen 11 groups of 7 generations. This places Jesus at the verge of the 12th group (Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 1.7.1–16). In biblical culture, number seven has an obvious symbolic meaning. Diverse interpretations of the names placed at multiple of seven have been put forth (Brown, 1993, 91–93). However, many manuscripts of this genealogy have a different number of generations. For example, Codex Vaticanus only has 76 names and → Irenaeus of Lyon (*Haer.* 3.22.3) counts 72.

Jesus' divine filiation frames the genealogy (Luke 3:22.38). The genealogy seems to be prompted by the heavenly voice that presents Jesus as "my son." After a quick remark on Jesus' age, the following verse mentions that "he was the son (as was thought) of Joseph" (Luke 3:23). The verb νομίζω can mean "to think, to assume, to believe, or to suppose." This sets up a dramatic irony since the characters in the story do not have access to the information directly made by the narrator to readers by this genealogy. If the characters of the story see Jesus as an ordinary human, son of Joseph, readers are invited to understand that there is another level to his filiation. If apparently, he is Joseph's son, his identity is revealed as son of God. However, these conceptions of Jesus' filiation are not necessarily in opposition, since the genealogy asserts that his filiation to God goes through his filiation to Joseph. A.T. Lincoln (2013, 118–124) presents these two perspectives as co-existing by comparing this genealogy with Greco-Roman literature.

Discrepancies Between Matthew and Luke

There are many discrepancies between Matthew and Luke's genealogies of Jesus. → Origen (*Cels.* 2.32) signals that Christians debated about the differences of the genealogies. They were also used as arguments against Christianity. A famous example is the Roman emperor → Julian the Apostate (*Gal.* 260) who asserts that Matthew and Luke are refuted by the fact that they disagree concerning Jesus' genealogy.

The different name for Joseph's father (Jacob in Matthew and Heli in Luke) is the most visible difference. Early Christian readers find ways to reconcile these accounts in a way that they could both be true.

Tertullian (*Carn. chr.* 20–22) and Victorinus of Pettau (*Comm. Apoc.* 4.7–10; → Victorinus of Petovium [Pettau]) present Mary as a descendent of David and attribute the genealogy in Matthew's Gospel as a list of Mary's ancestors.

The custom of levirate → marriage was also proposed as a solution. According to Deut 25:5–10, when a husband died without a child, his brother would marry the widow to give his deceased brother a lineage. The first attestation to this solution comes from Julius Africanus (Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 1.7.1–16) who distinguishes between a "natural" (φύσις) and a "legal" (νόμος) paternity. He sees Joseph as the son of Jacob by nature according to Matthew and as the son of Heli by law according to Luke. For → Eusebius of Caesarea (*Hist. eccl.* 1.7.17), Jesus is not the biological son of Joseph, but still a descendant of David by Mary whom he considers to be of the same tribe as Joseph. The levirate hypothesis does not resolve other discrepancies such as the different sons of David: Solomon in Matthew or Nathan in Luke (Brown, 1993, 503–504).

Another strategy is taken by the Bezae Codex (end of the 4th cent. CE) who creatively inserts an inverted version of Matthew's sequence of ancestors in Luke's Gospel (Lorenz, 2018).

Historiography

Some modern interpreters have followed church fathers in proposing complex reconciliation attempts between both genealogies of Jesus (Masson, 1982; Feuillet, 1988; Sivertsen, 2005). However, their hypothesis does not find evidence in the Gospel texts.

Historical-critical exegesis sees the two genealogies of Jesus as theological constructs rather than factual accounts. They tell us more about the identity of Jesus in Matthew and Luke's perspectives than anything about Jesus' ancestors. The standard work

on the genealogies with a historical inquiry is R.E. Brown (1993).

Genealogies are a condensed literary form that utilizes powerful political, social, and religious effects. They configure Jesus' identity, but they also show a formative role toward Luke and Matthew's audiences. J. Punt (2013) reinscribes these genealogies within an imperial context, an angle that should receive more attention (also Carter, 2005). J. Punt (2013) takes into account the negative views on genealogies voiced in Hebrews (7:3.6) and the Pastoral Letters (1 Tim 1:4; Titus 3:9) with an attention to gender and identity politics. Social-scientific approaches present the function of the genealogies as examples of ascribed honor (Malina, 1993, 33–34; Savarimuthu, 2012). Another possible avenue is to place the performance of genealogies as a ritual performed in an oral context (Loubser, 2005).

Among current research, feminist (Anderson, 2013; Clements, 2014) and gender-sensitive (Smit, 2010) approaches are utilized to study the women in Matthew's genealogy. S. Doane (2019a) and J. Punt (2014) also explores the masculinities expressed in Jesus' genealogy.

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SÉBASTIEN DOANE