

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 a little more sober.

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 of us who seek to remain true to the inerrancy of the Scripture 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 mindlessness 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

¹ www.infidels.org

pseudo-pigrapha books.² These folks obviously were privy to some kind of information that is not available today in a clear form.

- 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 the worst kind of liars who could not dot their “i’s” and cross their “t’s,” yet were successful in selling it to the entire world throughout the ages. It is fantastic to believe that liars, who in hypocrisy demanded honesty and integrity from their subjects, yet worked deceitfully in fabricating genealogies, the virgin birth and the resurrection? Such makes no sense.

The second choice is that there is a reasonable explanation, known or unknown, for the differences that exist. We prefer the latter 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 fisherman, 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

² Like the “Gospel of Thomas” etc.

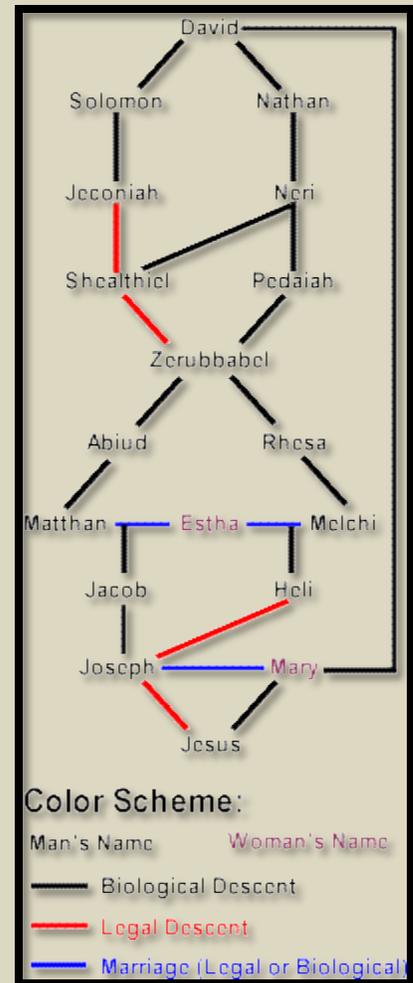
³ All verses are taken from the New King James Version © 1982

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.

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? It could be possible, we suppose. 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. There is a precedence of a man named "Jair" from the tribe of Judah. His father was Segub and his grandfather was Hezron (1 Chron. 2:21-22). 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). Hence Manasseh begot Machir who begot Jair's grandmother who begot Segub, Jair's father.

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 was the case, then the daughter of a man would receive the inheritance (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 was 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.

There are reasonable explanations for the differing names in the genealogies. Only those who are "willfully ignorant" of the way the Bible teaches will cry "contradiction" when in fact there is none. Some things simply take diligent research to work through. The honest and diligent truth-seeker will discover "gems" in those things skeptics call "contradictions."