

The genealogies of Jesus

Ed Form

Careful examination of Luke's genealogy of Jesus reveals a new perspective on Jesus's ancestry via his mother and on what he inherited through her.

TWO GENEALOGIES are given in the Gospels in connection with Jesus of Nazareth. The first, the one in Matthew 1, is not actually the genealogy of Jesus, but that of Joseph. Why is it there at all?

All the relationships listed in this genealogy, except the last, are given in terms of male parenthood: "Matthan begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary . . ." (vv. 15,16). In a genealogy of this form each successive male mentioned is the descendant of the man who precedes him in the list. So, in the fragment cited above, Jacob was Matthan's son. Matthew then continues, ". . . of whom was born Jesus", giving a single relationship for Jesus—to his mother. His only connection with Joseph was that Joseph married Mary.

Luke's genealogy of Jesus

The other genealogy, the one in Luke 3, is completely different. It is of the old Hebrew form, in which no definite relationship is given between the successive members of the list. There is an example of such a genealogy in Genesis 36:1,2 that neatly illustrates this point:

"Now these are the generations of Esau, who is Edom. Esau took his wives of the daughters of Canaan; Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Aholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite".

In this English form, and in the original Hebrew, we could be forgiven for assuming that the woman called Aholibamah was the daughter of someone called Anah, who was in turn the daughter of someone called Zibeon, a member of the Canaanite tribe, the Hivites. This conclusion would be a mistake. The person called Anah is mentioned twice more in the same chapter—at verse 18, which appears to support our initial idea that Anah was Zibeon's daughter, and at verse 24, which explains who this Anah actually was:

"And these are the children of Zibeon; both Ajah, and Anah: this was that Anah that found

the mules in the wilderness, as he fed the asses of Zibeon his father".

Anah was a man! So the genealogical fragment first cited actually says that Aholibamah was the daughter of Anah and the *granddaughter* of Zibeon. In fact the Hebrew words for 'son' and 'daughter' can refer to descendants of all generations. If we did not have verse 24 to tell us that Anah was a man we would have no way of knowing whether Anah was Zibeon's son or his daughter, because the list gives the relationships between Aholibamah and each listed ancestor, not those between the ancestors themselves. It is this structure which allows some genealogies in the Hebrew Scriptures to miss out generations and yet remain wholly true. The genealogy of Zerubbabel in 1 Chronicles 3 is a case in point; every word in it is true, but several generations seem to be missing.

The Luke 3 genealogy of Jesus is also in this form. It is, in fact, complete, and there *are* direct father-son relationships between successive members of the list, but no such relationship can be proved from the list itself. The highly condensed form of the Greek is as follows:

Jesus was commonly supposed to be the
son of Joseph
of the Heli
of the Matthat
of the Levi
of the Melchi . . .
of the Adam
of the God.

As the brilliant Cambridge scholar John Lightfoot pointed out 300 years ago, the case of the noun for "son", *huios*, in the first verse of the list is nominative, the subject of the verb, and will not support the standard expansion of this list:

Jesus was commonly supposed to be the
son of Joseph
who was the son of Heli
who was the son of Matthat
who was the son of Levi
who was the son of Melchi . . .
who was the son of Adam
who was the son of God—

for which the word 'son' would be *huiou*, the genitive case. Instead it demands that the list be expanded in the form:

Jesus was commonly supposed to be the son of Joseph

Jesus was the son of Heli
 Jesus was the son of Matthat
 Jesus was the son of Levi
 Jesus was the son of Melchi . . .
 Jesus was the son of Adam
 Jesus was the son of God.

We can now see that no relationship of any kind is stated between Joseph and Heli. This is not Joseph's second, conflicting genealogy, as some have suggested, and it certainly does not require any assumptions regarding the possibility that Joseph was Heli's son-in-law to explain it, although he actually was. All we are told here is that Jesus was the direct descendant of every single male member of the list, *except* Joseph, but explicitly *including* God.

Mary the family heir

The next question we have to ask is, Why did Joseph take Mary with him to be polled? It does not make sense. She was nine months' pregnant and really should not have been travelling.

We do not know very much about the taxing that year, but we do know what the Romans did when they taxed their subject peoples: they demanded that all heads of households return to the headquarters of their family to be examined regarding their possessions. They had no interest in who the spouses of these people were, or how many children they had; what they wanted to know was how much their possessions were worth in order to assess them for tax, and to take the tax from them. But Luke is quite clear in his description:

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child" (2:1-5).

Luke's typical precision gives us the clue we need. Verse 5 does not say that Joseph and Mary were married; she was "his *espoused wife*", a term with a very precise meaning in Jewish society. In modern parlance they were engaged, but without the possibility of breaking the engagement,

unless the bride turned out not to be a virgin; marriage became permanent after the wedding night had proven that the bride was chaste.

This was a problem in Mary's case; she was pregnant, and, what is more, Joseph did not lie with her at all until after Jesus was born, so the marriage was not finalised at this point. The term "espoused wife", which normally meant that the girl was still her father's dependant, plus the fact that she had been taken into Joseph's house (Mt. 1:24,25), and the fact that she journeyed to Bethlehem, strongly suggest that her father was dead, that he had no sons, and that she was his eldest child, the head of the house that bore his name, and therefore liable to taxation on her own account.

We know that the daughters of Israelite men who had no sons did inherit their father's name and property, because of the case of the daughters of Zelophehad (Num. 27:1-11). But we also know that Mary, an heiress, the beneficiary of Heli's estate and name, was bound by the Law to marry only from her father's kin. If she did not, her inheritance would be forfeit, and would go directly to her father's relatives under the second of the daughters-of-Zelophehad regulations (36:1-9).

This is why Matthew gives Joseph's genealogy; he was Mary's father's kinsman. The link between Joseph and Mary is that the man called Matthan by Matthew is the same man Luke calls Matthat; Mary and Joseph were second cousins. Because Mary married into her father's family, as the Law required, her right to Heli's name was preserved, and Jesus, her son, became the inheritor of that name through his mother.

The combination of the genealogy of Jesus in Luke, with evidence for the propriety of Mary's marriage to her second cousin supplied by the genealogy of Joseph, plus the clarity of the record that Mary was still a virgin when she became pregnant with her son, establishes that Jesus of Nazareth was the son of David, the son of Abraham by way of Isaac, the son of Adam, and the son of God. Jesus was therefore the very man promised to David (2 Sam. 7:11-14) and to Abraham (Gen. 22:15-18), and, because his mother alone passed him his membership of the human race, he was also the seed of the woman threatened to the serpent in Genesis 3:15.

Earlier cases

Remarkably, there is a similar case in the tribe of Judah at the Exodus. Caleb, the righteous and

faithful companion of Joshua, was the son of a member of the kin of Esau, Jephunneh the Kenizite (Gen. 36:11), but he was the *prince* of Judah chosen to spy out the land with the eleven princes of the other tribes. The only way he could have obtained this rank was if his mother was an heiress in Judah, married to a Kenizite who had converted to faith in the God of Israel. The issue of loss of land from the tribal allotment, which led to the regulations on whom an heiress could marry, would never have arisen in Jephunneh's case; he was not a member of any tribe, and had no property rights in Israel, but his son was a member of Judah through his mother, and heir to his maternal grandfather's place in the tribe.

An equally remarkable coincidence occurs in connection with Mary's family. She had a cousin, Elisabeth, a Levite, who was the mother of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:5,24,36). Having a female cousin

from Levi simply required that one of Mary's aunts married a Levite, and bore a daughter by him. Moses supplies a comparable example to this relationship between the women who bore the two remarkable cousins, John Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. The pious Elisabeth had the same name as Aaron's wife, Elisheba (Ex. 6:23), and Elisheba was also a member of the tribe of Judah, specifically the sister of Naashon, the prince of Judah at the first numbering in the wilderness (Num. 7:12). So Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron and Elisheba, who obviously were all Levites, were the cousins of Salmon (Salma in 1 Chron. 2:11) the father of Boaz and the great-great-grandfather of David the king (Ruth 4:18-22). This exact parallel, pointed out to us by the echo of the lovely name Elisabeth, is all the more remarkable because the Judaite relatives of these Levites were ancestors of the Lord Jesus.

Froglie spirits in the Middle East

Nigel Bernard

In this article we consider signs of democracy in the Middle East. These signs are shown to be related to the sixth vial in Revelation 16. Democratic trends in Jordan are considered also in relation to Daniel 11.

IN REVELATION 16, as part of the sixth vial, the "unclean spirits like frogs . . . go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (vv. 13,14). In Revelation the phrase "kings of the earth" relates particularly to Europe. The froglie spirits of democracy have affected many European countries in the past sixteen years, causing revolutions and the downfall of communist governments. But these spirits will also affect "the whole world". The key area of the world in relation to the purpose of God is the Middle East, and the last few weeks have seen democratic developments in this area which may prove to have far-reaching consequences.

Democratic trends

There have recently been protests on the streets of Lebanon calling for more democracy and the withdrawal of Syrian troops. This follows the

assassination of Rafik Hariri, the former Lebanese prime minister, and the resignation of the Lebanese Government. *The Economist* states: "For the Lebanese, what some are calling a 'cedar revolution' and others a 'peaceful *intifada*' carries the promise of an end not just to Syrian occupation but also to a corrupt spoils system that has long sapped the country's talent and morale".¹ To what extent this "promise" will be realised remains to be seen. The pro-Syrian Lebanese Hizbullah supporters responded to these protests by holding a rally that attracted 100,000 people.

There have been various other recent signs in the Middle East that democracy is gaining a foothold. In Iraq, despite continuing violence, there has been a general election, an event credited with encouraging moves towards democracy in other countries in the region. The Palestinians have also held a successful presidential election. In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak has announced that, for the first time, he will allow alternative candidates to stand against him when

1. "Something Stirs", *The Economist*, 5 Mar. 2005, pp. 24-26.