

# Tracing the sceptre—opposing views on the genealogies of Jesus

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The subject of the genealogy of Jesus is contentious. It raises difficult questions about the descent of the Christ from David, the applicability of the curse on David's descendant Jeconiah, the different number of generations in each genealogy, and biblical inspiration in general. There are also many ways to solve the riddle of why Matthew 1, Luke 3, and 1 Chronicles 3 contain different name lists. For those who accept the historicity of these accounts, one solution posits that Matthew is tracing Joseph's lineage while Luke is tracing Mary's. This is a common view today, though most scholars throughout Christian history appealed to levirate marriages and adoptive relationships to explain the discordant name lists. One rarely explored option is the possibility that Matthew's list is not actually a genealogy but a list of the rightful kings of Judah. In this case, Matthew traces the sceptre and Luke traces the family tree, with the possibility that both converge on Joseph. In fact, the three genealogies can be shown to converge into a single, simple, non-contradictory solution, with Zerubbabel as the pivotal figure. This does not mean that this must be the correct solution, but it is highly likely that, contrary to popular opinion, both Matthew and Luke are tracing different aspects of Joseph's lineage, one kingly and one biological.

The genealogies of Jesus in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 are highly divergent. The parallel information in 1 Chronicles 3 introduces even more difficulties. Skeptics use this to deny the inspiration of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have struggled with this for two millennia. Two main views, each with several possible permutations, have been at the forefront of the debate. The 'levirate marriage hypothesis' is probably the most common view espoused throughout church history and can be traced at least as far back as Julius Africanus (c. AD 160–240). Eusebius (c. AD 260–339) also supported this view.<sup>2</sup> A second view, much more popular today, is that Matthew traces Joseph's lineage and Luke traces that of Mary. This can be found in Hilary of Poitiers (c. AD 310–367), who claims this view was common at the time,<sup>2</sup> and John of Damascus (AD 676–749). Being that notable people such as J. Gresham Machen and John Piper held, or hold, to a different interpretation, it is surprising that many Christians are unaware of other possible solutions to the apparent dilemma.

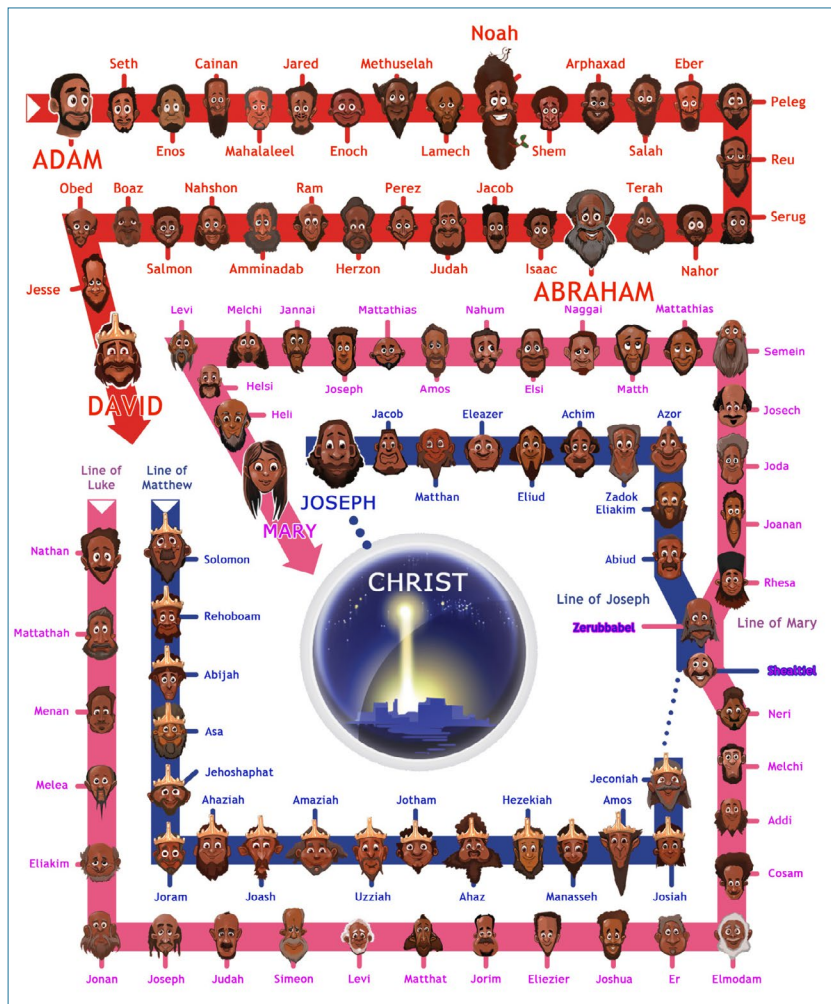
Almost every possible combination of ideas has, at least at one point, been suggested by some scholar of repute. This includes the idea that Matthew and Luke are both tracing the line of Joseph, that both are tracing the line of Mary, and that Matthew is following *Mary's* lineage while Luke is following Joseph's.<sup>3</sup> Consulting historic Bible commentaries, the notes included in various study Bibles, and papers published in various scholarly journals, including sources from all the major publishing houses, will turn up a bewildering array of viewpoints.<sup>4</sup> Among current scholars, the consensus seems to be that the two lists are irreconcilable.<sup>2</sup> Some famous preachers do not even attempt to fix the problem, leaving it

up to the scholars.<sup>5</sup> Many teach that Matthew's goal was to emphasize the Davidic kingship. They discuss the theological and symbolic elements in Matthew 1, but often from a literary perspective and not so much from a historical perspective. So they leave the plain reading conundrum unanswered. Many lay people simply throw up their hands, finding a solution neither in the Bible nor coming from their church leadership.

Scholarship is nearly unanimous in believing that Matthew 1 traces the genealogy of Joseph, but they are split on what this means. Some believe that Jeconiah (discussed below) repented and was restored,<sup>6</sup> thus paving the way for him to be in the line of Christ. Others believe that his line was cut off, so Jesus needed another line to David (e.g., through Mary). Among the minority of current scholars who believe that Matthew is tracing the right to the throne of Judah, few have attempted a historical reconstruction of the events that led to the sceptre being passed from the lineage of Solomon to the lineage of his brother Nathan.

For this last position to work, we need a way to incorporate the prophetic, genealogical, and historical information scattered across nearly a dozen biblical books. We need a simple solution that is both faithful to the text and which makes as few assumptions as possible. It also needs to follow Jewish law. This can be done, and one possible solution will be presented below. One can make a strong case that Matthew is indeed tracing the sceptre while Luke is tracing the genealogy, and both converge in Joseph.

No solution answers every possible objection. Since this is an issue of biblical perspicuity, and since this impinges on the deity of Christ, via the accuracy of the Gospels, and since our understanding of biblical genealogies informs us



**Figure 1.** A classic interpretation of the two genealogies of Jesus. Here, the line given in Matthew and Luke splits after David, with Matthew tracing Solomon’s line and Luke tracing that of his brother Nathan. Many believe that Matthew is tracing the lineage of Jesus’ father, Joseph, while Luke is tracing the lineage of his mother, Mary. An alternative solution is presented in this article.

about other important questions like the age of the earth,<sup>7</sup> we need to carefully parse the relevant data and be circumspect about our conclusions.<sup>8</sup>

Descendants of King David

We know that the ‘savior’ promised in the Old Testament would be a human male (Genesis 3:15), and a descendant of Abraham (Genesis 22:18), then Judah (Genesis 49:10), then David (Jeremiah 23:5). Yet, the Messiah did not appear prior to the close of the Old Testament canon, and David’s descendants had been decimated and scattered via the Babylonian conquest, the return to Judea, and devastating warfare during the Maccabean, Idumean, and early Roman periods.

While the kings of Judah might be expected to have had many children,<sup>9</sup> most of the names of the royal children

have been lost to time.<sup>10</sup> The royal family was also constantly embroiled in turmoil and came close to extinction on more than one occasion.<sup>11</sup> Yet, descendants of the house of Solomon and his brother Nathan are known to have survived; Solomon’s line continues through all the kings of Judah, of course, and the line of Nathan is mentioned in Zechariah 12:12.

Since David was born over 1,000 years prior, he potentially had millions of descendants by the time of Christ’s birth. Yet, there is a difference between a generic descendant of David and a person who could claim to be the *rightful* king. After Solomon, who was not the oldest surviving son of David,<sup>12</sup> the Kingdom of Judah followed strict rules of primogeniture.<sup>13</sup> Only the oldest surviving son of the king could claim the right (e.g., 2 Chronicles 21:3). When a claimant died with no sons of his own, the sceptre would have passed to another line. This is especially important when it comes to tracing the line of David through the Babylonian Captivity.

When the Babylonians destroyed Judah in 586 BC, they set up a crisis in the lineage of David. Three of the four sons of Josiah had sat on the throne, but only one grandson (Jeconiah) had any surviving sons (appendix 1). Yet, the prophecies against this wicked king

were direct and severe. Thus, there remains an open question as to whether the Messiah could ever have come from him. The casual reader might insist that Jeconiah’s survival (and eventual procreation) does not remove God’s curse, citing Jeremiah 22:30. And yet, God did prophesy about forgiveness in this same context (e.g., Jeremiah 36:3). It is possible that God ‘repented’ of His curse on Jeconiah. Despite the uncategorical nature of the original pronouncement against him, such a reversal is not unwarranted in Scripture. Consider that God proclaimed that Ninevah *would* be overthrown (Jonah 3:4), yet their repentance made Him relent (Jonah 3:6–10). Ezekiel 18 also sets out a path of redemption. Even though God proclaims, “The soul who sins shall die” (v. 20), He also states that He has no “pleasure in the death of the wicked” and wants them to “turn from his way of life and live” (Ezekiel 18:21–23).

The Talmud teaches that Jeconiah repented and was restored,<sup>14</sup> and Christians who believe Jeconiah is in the genealogy of Jesus only have to mention the fact that his descendants are in Matthew's genealogy of the Christ. However, nothing is simple here.

#### New Testament genealogies

In the New Testament, we are treated to two disparate genealogies of Jesus (figure 1). These follow very different lines and contain a highly divergent number of generations. The Gospel of Matthew includes a list of 44 names in a line that connects Abraham to Jesus.

Luke 3:23–38 includes more names (56 men from Abraham to Jesus) and goes all the way back to Adam. The list from Abraham to David is identical in both accounts, but Matthew has 30 generations from David to Jesus while Luke has 42. Worse, two of the names (Shealtiel and Zerubbabel) are identical in both lists. Thus, either two father/son pairs with identical names just happened to exist in two disparate lines, or the two genealogies come together for unexplained reasons for those two generations, only to split again. But then one line had 11 generations while another had 20, in the same amount of time.

1 Chronicles creates more confusion. Chapter 3 contains a detailed list of the descendants of David. After Jeconiah, none of the names match either those of Matthew or Luke. The exception is that a Shealtiel and a Zerubbabel are listed, but as grandfather/grandson. It is unlikely that all three sources have a *different* Shealtiel/Zerubbabel pair.<sup>15</sup>

#### Option 1—Luke follows Mary's line; Matthew follows Joseph's line

Matthew's highly stylized list left out multiple generations to arrive at a mathematical formula (three sets of 14 names) that would be easy to memorize. He leaves out Ahaziah, Jehoash, and Amaziah (the kings that ruled between Jehoram and Uzziah) and Jehoiakim (father of Jeconiah). This raises the real possibility that he left additional names out later. Yet, other classic appeals to 'missing generations' (e.g., the lineage of Moses through the Egyptian Sojourn<sup>16</sup> and the detailed chronogenealogies in Genesis 5 and 11<sup>17</sup>) come up short when carefully analyzed. Thus, we should not cavalierly insist that Matthew left out names between Jeconiah and Jesus, even though the shortness of the name list, when compared to that in Luke's list, does suggest it.

Option 1 is supported by the fact that Matthew starts with the words, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυεὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ). The word 'genealogy' (γενέσεως) deals with the origin, nature, or existence of something, depending on context. Yet, by starting with the word 'book' (βίβλος), Matthew seems to be laying out a

detailed record of Jesus' birth lineage. Even though Jesus was not the literal son of David nor David the literal son of Abraham, he felt free to use the term 'son of' in both cases. This might indicate that there will be missing generations in the subsequent list. Yet, it also means that the names are not always father/son pairs, which will become important later.

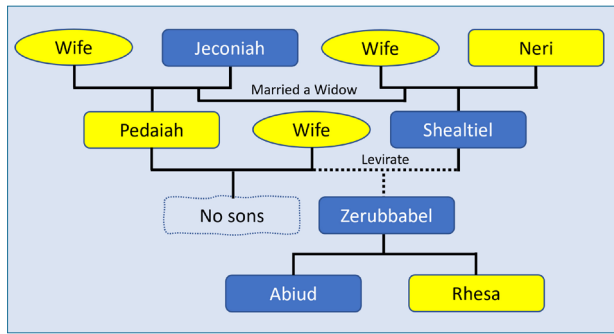
Fruchtenbaum believes that the intent of Matthew's genealogy was to show that the Messiah could *not* be a son of Joseph. First, Matthew cites the names of four women, at least two of whom were gentiles and at least three of whom have sordid backgrounds (why did Matthew leave out Sarah, for example?). Matthew then traces the line through Jeconiah, through whom the Messiah could not come. The "seed of the woman" (Genesis 3:15) and "a virgin shall be with child" (Isaiah 7:14) feature heavily in his argument. There is no reference to the male line in either prophecy. He also notes the use of the definite article prior to every name in Luke's list, except for Joseph. He says this would have been a clue to any reader (in the original language) that the genealogy was not that of Joseph. Instead, it was of his unnamed wife. Putting aside his virginal conception, Jesus could not be the son of Joseph, according to Fruchtenbaum, because then Jesus could not be the Messiah.<sup>18</sup>

If Luke is tracing the line of Mary, this would be a unique feature of the Bible. In no other place are the rights of inheritance traced through a woman.<sup>19</sup> Either way, most scholars at least agree that Matthew is tracing Joseph's lineage.

#### Option 2—Matthew and Luke both trace the line of Joseph

The other common view attempts to blend the genealogies together. Sanders outlined the possibility of the existence of multiple adoptive and levirate relationships among the men listed in Matthew's genealogy, but also left open the possibility of missing generations.<sup>20</sup> She notes that the Greek wording in both genealogical accounts strongly indicates that Joseph is the father of Jesus (see below). One solution to the dilemma is that under Jewish law, when a man died without a son, the man's brother was expected to marry the widow and raise a son for his brother (Deuteronomy 25:5–10). These are called 'levirate marriages' (from the Latin *levir*, 'husband's brother').

As mentioned above, this thinking has a long tradition in Christian scholarship. In the *Letter to Aristides*, Africanus suggested that after Jesus' grandfather Jacob was born, Jacob's father (Matthan) died. The widow then married a man named Heli and they had Heli. After marrying, Heli died. Being that Jacob was Heli's half-brother, he had a levirate marriage to the widow and together they had Joseph. If you find this confusing, you are not alone. The point is that levirate marriages commingle family lines and provide



**Figure 2.** Combining the three genealogies of Shealtiel and Zerubbabel in 1 Chronicles, Matthew, and Luke leads to this possible solution. Names in blue indicate those who held the sceptre. In this schema, 1 Chronicles traces the genealogy of David, through Solomon to Pedaiah, then through Pedaiah to Zerubbabel via a levirate marriage. This would be technically and legally correct. Matthew, on the other hand, traces those who held the sceptre, and so skips over Pedaiah and creates a break in Jeconiah's bloodline. Finally, Luke traces the specific genealogy of Joseph from David, via Nathan, to Neri, Shealtiel, Zerubbabel, and Rhesa.

a possible solution. It is also important to note that levirate marriages can occur at various levels of kinship (e.g., Ruth 4:1–12), not just between brothers.

What if Matthew wrote out a king list, not a genealogy?

One addition to this hypothesis that most have missed is the idea that Matthew's list might be a king list, not a genealogy. This is found in the writings of Machen<sup>21</sup> and John Piper,<sup>22</sup> but neither of them flesh it out much.<sup>23</sup> Machen writes:

“The most probable answer is that Matthew gives the legal descendants of David—the men who would have been legally the heir to the Davidic throne if that throne had been continued—while Luke gives the descendants of David in that particular line to which, finally, Joseph, the husband of Mary, belonged” (p. 64).

“But on the whole we are inclined to think that the true key to a solution of the problem (however the solution may run in detail) is to be found in the fact that Matthew, in an intentionally incomplete way, gives a list of incumbents (actual or potential) of the kingly Davidic throne, while Luke traces the descent of Joseph, back through Nathan to David” (p. 65).

There are significant differences between a genealogy and a king list. For example, if an outside observer did not know the detailed history of the British monarchy, they might be fooled into thinking these are parent/child relationships, yet fully half of them are not (appendix 2). What might that tell us about Matthew's list?

If Matthew contains a list of eligible kings, it is not a list of *actual* kings, so there are no co-regencies, etc. Any time a man died without a male heir, the birthright would

shift to another line. If that sonless man lived to a ripe old age, his brother, nephew, maybe even grandnephew, may have predeceased him. Thus, the sceptre would have passed to a much younger person and the name list would skip several generations. This alone might explain the shortness of Matthew's list.<sup>24</sup>

How can Matthew and Luke both trace *Joseph's* line?

Following Sanders,<sup>13</sup> and contrary to Fruchtenbaum, the Greek seems to indicate that both lines are tracing Joseph's lineage. Matthew 1:15b–16 reads:

Ματθᾶν δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰακώβ Ἰακώβ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας  
(... Matthan begat Jacob, Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary ...).

Luke 3:23–24a reads:

ὢν υἱὸς ὡς ἐνομίζετο Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Ἡλὶ τοῦ Μαθθαὶ τοῦ Λευὶ  
(... the son, as was supposed, Joseph, of Heli, of Matthat, of Levi ...).

How can both accounts trace the line of Joseph when they are so entirely dissimilar? Was Joseph's father named Jacob or Heli? If Matthew's list is not a genealogy, the mystery might be solvable.

Yet, much has been made of a single missing word in Luke 3:23 (e.g., “the son ... Joseph, of Heli ...”, instead of “the son ... of Joseph, of Heli ...”). Fruchtenbaum,<sup>7</sup> Robertson,<sup>25</sup> and Sarfati<sup>26</sup> all assert that the omission would indicate to any Greek reader that Joseph was not to be included in the list. Hence, Heli would be Mary's father instead of Joseph's. The Talmud (Hagigah 2:2) also states that Heli was Mary's father. On the other hand, Joseph starts off the list in Luke's genealogy, and writing ‘of Joseph’ would have indicated that Jesus was Joseph's son, which would be an error. Many have asserted that Mary's reputed father, Heli, may have adopted Joseph if he had no sons of his own. Thus, Joseph *can* be the ‘son’ of Heli even if Mary is Heli's daughter. This, though, does not address the repetition of Shealtiel/Zerubbabel in the three lists. Unless Mary is also a descendant of Zerubbabel, as some others claim. Yet that proposition does not explain how the names in ‘Mary's’ genealogy are so different than those of ‘Joseph’ or how ‘Mary's’ line could go back to Nathan.

Machen was a contemporary of Robertson and would have been aware of his views, especially since his quotes, above, were printed a full decade after the publication of Robertson's *A Harmony of the Gospels* (1922). One wonders why Machen disagreed with the others. He was certainly competent in the original language (e.g., he wrote an influential NT Greek textbook<sup>27</sup> that was used in many seminaries for decades after he died).

Who was Zerubbabel?

In the first year of Cyrus the Great (ruled 559–530 BC), a group of 42,360 Jews returned to Judah (Ezra 2:1–2, 64; 3:8; 5:2). They were led by two men: Zerubbabel, who was appointed the provincial governor of Judah (Haggai 1:1, 14), and the priest, Joshua son of Jehozadak. Scholarly sources refer to Zerubbabel as the ‘Exilarch’ (e.g., the head of the exile). Two of his sons, Meshulam and Hananiah, held that title after him, and Hananiah’s descendants are detailed in 1 Chronicles ([appendix 3](#)). There is another important figure in the account, Sheshbazzar son of Jeconiah. He is referred to as ‘the prince of Judah’ (Ezra 1:8), and the ‘governor’ (Ezra 5:14). It can be assumed that the Shenazzar (son of Jeconiah) in 1 Chronicles is the Sheshbazzar (a prince and a governor of Judah) in Ezra. It was to him that the temple treasures were entrusted, although it was Zerubbabel who returned with them to Judah.

Contrast what God said about Jeconiah to what He said about Zerubbabel:

“... though Coniah ... were the signet ring on my right hand, yet I would tear you off ...” (Jeremiah 22:24).

“On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts” (Haggai 2:23).

See also Zechariah 4:6–10.

Zerubbabel was the son of Shealtiel. Since Zerubbabel was a descendant of David, the remnant (Haggai 1:12) of the Jewish people knew who their leader was, even though the kingly line had nearly died out. Here is an open question: did God restore the line of Jeconiah, or was Zerubbabel from a different line (e.g., that of Nathan)? If the latter, the signet ring had been taken from Solomon’s line and transferred to the line of Nathan. If the former, God had retracted His curse.

Sixty or more years after the death of Zerubbabel, one of Nehemiah’s opponents claimed:

“It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, ‘There is a king in Judah’” (Nehemiah 6:6b–7a).

This provides a hint that the Jews were tracking who held the right to the throne, even if they never intended to act on it. And it does not have to be true that this was common knowledge outside the citizens of the village of Bethlehem later on. Even today, there are multiple living people descended from royal families who are alive but will never be in positions of power. This includes individuals from countries like Albania, Burundi, China, Korea, Finland, France, Hawaii, and Mexico.

Most people in the world are completely unaware of this, yet the (extended) families certainly have not forgotten.

To resolve the problem of multiple Shealtiel/Zerubbabel pairs, it is possible that men with the same name would appear in different family lines at about the same time.<sup>28</sup> We can see other common names in the biblical account throughout this period.<sup>29</sup> The problem is that the Shealtiel/Zerubbabel combo occurs in three different lines (1 Chronicles, Matthew, and Luke). It is entirely *unlikely* that the name combination happened independently so many times. Two pairs might be a fluke. Three pairs requires a better explanation.

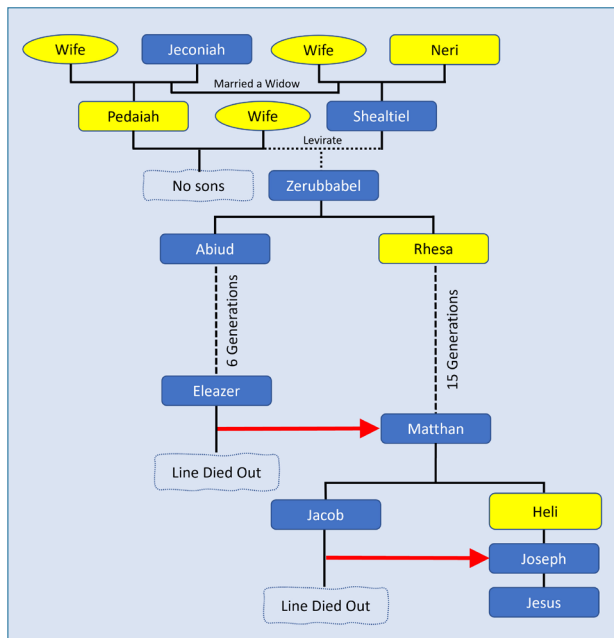
A proposed solution

Marshall claimed, “It is only right therefore to admit that the problem caused by the existence of the two genealogies is insoluble with the evidence presently at our disposal.”<sup>30</sup> Was he correct? What if an answer to the dilemma existed? What we would need is a solution that is faithful to Scripture, that incorporates multiple minor details given to us in a dozen biblical books, and that properly handles prophecy, historical narrative, and straight-up genealogy. This solution needs to match Old Testament law and must have as few assumptions built into it as possible. There could be more than one possible solution, but consider figure 2.

Assuming there are no missing generations, we might be dealing with different genealogical tables in 1 Chronicles 3 and Matthew 1. The reason the descendants of Jeconiah don’t match might be due to the simple fact that the Chronicler recorded only a subset of the genealogy and Matthew pulled from a different subset. In the world of genealogy, descendant trees are much more complex than ancestor trees. Even though the number of places in the family tree goes up by a factor of ‘2’ for each generation in an ancestor tree, the number of people in a descendant tree is indeterminate and multi-branched and there is no simple way to display multi-generational descendant trees (e.g., the information in Genesis 10). It might also be true that many of the men listed went by more than one name. Thus, there might be no way to combine the two lists, and perhaps we should not expect to be able to do so.

However, there is an elegant and simple solution to the dilemma that incorporates all the relevant information without any contradictions and without any appeals to special pleading. It does, though, involve two steps that are not mentioned in Scripture. Each is probable and each occurred many times in history, so it is not like we must chain together a series of improbable events.

*If* Jeconiah had several wives, which is not unexpected, and *if* he married a widow who already had a son, that son would have become the son of Jeconiah by adoption. We do not need to know how many wives or how many sons Jeconiah had or by whom. We only need to surmise that he had an older son named Pedaiah by one wife and a younger



**Figure 3.** One possible way that the sceptre passed from Abiud's descendants to a descendant of Rhesa and then from Jacob's line to the son of Heli. As above, the names in blue indicate those who held the sceptre. The red arrows can indicate lineage tracing, marriages to widows who already had a son, adoptions, or levirate marriages, as necessary.

adopted son named Shealtiel by another wife. Pedaiah's being older is an assumption, but it is not critical. It is assumed that it would be unlikely that a former king would marry a woman who already had a son before he had at least one son of his own. The next assumption is that Pedaiah married but died without having any sons. In that case, it was the duty of the stepbrother to marry Pedaiah's widow so he could raise up a son in Pedaiah's name. In fact, had he not done this, he would have been cursed according to the Law (Deuteronomy 25:7–10). The result of this levirate marriage was "Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel". The third assumption is that Pedaiah died before his father.

This putatively solves the puzzle:

- 1 Chronicles 3 traces the levirate line:  
Jeconiah → Pedaiah → Zerubbabel
- Matthew 1 traces the sceptre:  
Jeconiah → Shealtiel → Zerubbabel
- Luke 3 traces the genealogy of Joseph:  
Neri → Shealtiel → Zerubbabel

All three genealogies are correct and true. There is no ambiguity and there are no contradictions in this solution.

Intermarriage among the descendants of David

Consider the final three generations in Matthew and Luke:

- Matthew: Matthan → Jacob → Joseph
- Luke: Matthat → Heli → Joseph

Are Matthan and Matthat the same person? The name similarity is striking. If so, Matthan had two sons, Jacob and Heli. If Jacob was older, and if he died without any sons, the kingship would have transferred to the closest relative. If Heli was already dead, the sceptre would have gone to Joseph (figure 3).<sup>31</sup>

There are many possible ways for the sceptre to have passed from one line to another among the descendants of Zerubbabel. Levirate marriages and adoptions can keep a line going forward, as seen above. But lineage tracing can be used to restore a line that was lost. For example, if the Eleazar in Matthew's list failed to have any sons, a search would have been made for the closest living male relative. Even if they had to go all the way back to the sons of Zerubbabel, this would not have been impossible. In fact, that would mirror the 'Capetian Miracle' that happened in 16<sup>th</sup>-century France (appendix 2). If that closest relative was Matthan, Matthew would list him as rightful heir and the two New Testament genealogies would be united, briefly. They would have had to be re-united two generations later for Matthew to list Joseph as the rightful heir and for Luke to list him as the (supposed) father of Jesus. In fact, many such events could have happened in the generations between Abiud and Eleazar. All Matthew gave us was a list of the men who held the sceptre, not their genealogical connections.

Fruchtenbaum claimed:

"Therefore if Jesus were the real son of Joseph, he would have been disqualified from sitting on David's throne. Neither could he claim the right to David's throne by virtue of his adoption by Joseph, since Joseph was not the heir apparent."<sup>7</sup>

Yet, in the construct suggested above, Joseph is not Jeconiah's descendant by blood. Given any number of possible scenarios, the sceptre could have passed from Solomon's line to that of Nathan. Fruchtenbaum also points out that his solution (i.e., Luke traces Mary's line) is only one of several possibilities, linking to an article that asserts that Jeconiah repented and was restored.<sup>32</sup>

Is Matthew's list really a king list?

Option 2 is a real possibility. We have a realistic explanation that incorporates all the facts and produces a system without any contradictions. *This does not mean that it is true.* However, it does mean that the differences between 1 Chronicles 3, Matthew 1, and Luke 3 do not contradict one another. It also opens up additional theological considerations. For example, did the people around Jesus know that he was the rightful king of Judah (appendix 4)?

## Conclusion

If we have a workable solution, biblical skeptics will have to look elsewhere for reasons to reject the Bible. The

thought that Matthew is tracing the kingly line does nothing but strengthen the perspicuity of Scripture. This is just one more example of the self-consistency of the text. If the Bible was *not* the Word of God, we would expect to find many errors and contradictions, and we would throw up our hands when approaching difficult challenges like this. If, on the other hand, the Bible is what it claims to be, we would expect to be able to work out solutions to vexing problems like an apparent genealogical discord. And we can.

## References

1. E.g., see [Genealogy of Jesus](#), rationalwiki.org.
2. Miller, G.D., Trying to fix the family trees of Jesus, *Scripture Bulletin* 39:17–30, 2009. Miller also states, in *Questiones Evangelicae ad Stephanum*, that Eusebius suggested Luke's account was made up to pacify the Jews who believed the Messiah could not have come through Jeconiah.
3. See, for example, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Luke* (Bock, D.L.), Intervarsity Press, 1994; See [The genealogy of Jesus \(3:23–38\)](#), biblegateway.com.
4. For background research on this article, I consulted: Poole's *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 1685, MacDonald Publishing Company, 1985; Matthew Henry's *Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1706, Thomas Nelson, 1997; John Gill's *Exposition of the Bible* (a multi-volume work published 1746–1763, available online); Robertson's *A Harmony of the Gospels*, Harper, 1922; Machen's *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1930; *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Moody Bible Institute, 1962; Buswell's *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, Zondervan, 1962; Clarke's *Commentary on the Bible*, Baker Book House, 1967; *Unger's Bible Handbook*, Moody Press, 1967; Marshal's *NIGTC Commentary: the Gospel of Luke*, Eerdmans, 1978; Trapp's *A Commentary or Exposition of the New Testament*, Baker Book House, 1981; Nicoll's *The Expositor's Greek New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1983; *The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Holman Bible Publishers, 2003; and, *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Intervarsity Press, 2013. I also included various web articles and blog posts in my search, some of which are referenced later in the article. I avoided scholars who followed the trends of higher criticism and focused on a selection of more conservative works that spanned several centuries. Other works that did not add anything new to the discussion were excluded from the list above.
5. E.g., see Sproul, R.C., [The genealogy of Jesus](#), ligonier.org, 11 Mar 2012.
6. This position can be found in, for example, the footnotes in *The Reformation Study Bible*, edited by R.C. Sproul.
7. Hardy, C. and Carter, R., [The biblical minimum and maximum age of the earth](#), *J. Creation* 28(2):89–96, 2014.
8. In the words of Myles Smith, who wrote the introduction to the first edition of the King James Bible, "It has pleased God in his divine providence, here and there to scatter words and sentences of difficulty and doubtfulness, not in doctrinal points that concern salvation (for in such it has been vouched that the Scriptures are plain), but in matters of less moment, such that fearfulness would better beseeem us than confidence." Let us take this admonition to heart as we wrestle with a very difficult topic.
9. For example, David had 20 named children and additional unnamed ones via his several concubines (1 Chronicles 3:1–9).
10. For example, the names of only three of Solomon's children, two of whom were daughters, are known, even though he had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 4:11, 4:15, 11:3).
11. For example, Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat killed his seven brothers and multiple princes when he took the throne (2 Chronicles 21:4). Later, Israel's King Jehu slaughtered the relatives of Judah's King Ahaziah (2 Kings 10:12–14), which was followed by the slaughter of the royal family by Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah. Only one of Ahaziah's sons (Joash), but at least one sister (Jehosheba) survived (1 Kings 11:1–3).
12. Solomon was not the oldest surviving son of David, and, being the fourth son of his mother, was not even the oldest surviving son of David and Bathsheba.
13. From Solomon to Josiah, there was but one exception to the rules of primogeniture (Queen Athaliah), but even then, the proper order was restored when Jehoash, the young son of her deceased husband (Jehoram) by another wife (Zibiah), was placed on the throne.
14. The problem of the curse on Jeconiah in relation to the genealogy of Jesus, [jewsforjesus.org](#), 1 Jan 2005.
15. In addition, eight or nine generations are listed after Jeconiah ([appendix 1](#)). This is far too many to fit into the timeline of when Chronicles was composed, leading some scholars to postulate a composition date much later than Ezra/Nehemiah.
16. Carter, R. and Sanders, L., [How long were the Israelites in Egypt?](#) creation.com, 21 Sep 2021.
17. Sarfati, J., [Biblical chronogenealogies](#), *J. Creation* 17(3):14–18, 2003.
18. Fruchtenbaum, A.G., [The Genealogy of the Messiah: the New Testament traces Jesus lineage through David and Abraham](#), [jewsforjesus.org](#), 20 Apr 2018.
19. Perhaps with the exception of the Daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 26:33; 27:1–11; Joshua 17:3–4). But this case is more about property rights and how property was to be distributed and inherited among the clans than about genealogy.
20. Sanders, L., [The genealogies of Jesus](#), *Creation* 37(1):22–25, 2015.
21. Machen, J.G., *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, Harper & Brothers, New York, chap. 14, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1932. This work is cited in Sarfati's *The Virginal Conception of Christ* (ref. 21 below), but Machen held to 'Option 2' while Sarfati holds to 'Option 1'. The first edition (1930) is available online; [monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/machen/virginbirth\\_p.pdf](#).
22. Piper, J., [The baptism and the genealogy of Jesus](#), [desiringgod.org](#), 23 Feb 1981.
23. According to Miller (ref. 2), Jean Calvin also supported this theory, but without appealing to levirate marriages, so he failed to address the commingling of the names Shealtiel and Zerubbabel in the three lists. He cites Calvin, J., *Commentaries on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 1, 1845.
24. Is it also possible that an unrealized king list might jump from the dead 'king' to the end of the line? This would be akin to Prince George being named 'king', skipping over Charles and William, after the recent death of Queen Elizabeth II.
25. Robertson, A.T., *A Harmony of the Gospels*, Harper, San Francisco, NY, p. 261, 1922.
26. Sarfati, J., [The virginal conception of Christ](#), creation.com, 24 Dec 2014.
27. Machen, A.W., *New Testament Greek for Beginners*, McMillen, Toronto, 1923. Note: I used this in my Greek classes in the 1990s.
28. In my own family, my great-great-grandfather, Henry Augustus Hurlbut, was named after his uncle, a rich financier and philanthropist. But the uncle named his son after himself. A third brother also named his son after the rich brother: three cousins and an uncle all shared the same name!
29. For example, King Josiah had a son named Johanan, but another Johanan (the son of Kareah) featured heavily in the account around this time (c.f., Jeremiah 43:1–7). Also, Jeconiah had a brother named Zedekiah, the same name that Nebuchadnezzar assigned to their uncle Mattaniah.
30. Marshal, I.H., *NIGTC Commentary: The Gospel of Luke*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 159, 1978. Quoted in ref. 20.
31. Piper, J., [Who Was Jesus' Grandfather?](#) [desiringgod.org](#), 18 Nov 1997.
32. [The problem of the Curse on Jeconiah in relation to the genealogy of Jesus](#), [jewsforjesus.org](#), 1 Jan 2005.

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