

The Genealogy of Jesus

Matthew 1:1-17 vs. Luke 3:23-38

1. There is no way to know for sure why these two lists are different because the authors did not tell us. There are several possible explanations; so, let us consider some of them. (Further details are available in *SDA Bible Commentary* vol. 6, p. 276-81; 720-723.)
2. Matthew was speaking primarily to Jews and traced the ancestry to Abraham. His audience understood the importance and typical uses of Jewish ancestry lists. Luke was speaking to a much wider Gentile audience and, thus, traced the ancestry all the way back to Adam and to God. Therefore, Luke included every human in “the family.”
3. Both Matthew and Luke recognized that Jesus was not genetically related to Joseph. (See Matthew 1:16; Luke 3:23.) But, they also recognized that, officially, Jesus was recorded in the temple as the son of Joseph. (Matthew 13:55-56; Luke 2:21-24; *DA* 52) Mary was also “of the house of David,” (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16; Isaiah 9:6-7; Acts 2:29-30; 13:23; Romans 1:3; 2 Timothy 2:8; *DA* 44) making Jesus “legally” and “biologically” a “son of David.” If this had not been so, Jesus would have been discredited immediately. (See Ezra 2:62; Nehemiah 7:64.)
4. The two lists differ mainly in the following ways:
 - a. Luke listed 41 ancestors from David to Christ; Matthew listed 26.
 - b. The lists are different except for Salathiel (Shealtiel), Zerubbabel, and Joseph the husband of Mary.
 - c. Matthew stated that Salathiel was the son of “Jeconiah”; Luke said he was the son of “Neri.”
 - d. Matthew identified Joseph as the son of “Jacob”; Luke said he was the son of “Heli” (Greek for “Eli”).
 - e. Nothing at all is known about 60 of the 64 people listed in **both** lists between David and Christ.
 - f. Very little is known even about the other 4 people who are on **both** lists (Jeconiah, Shealtiel, Zerubbabel, and Joseph [Mary’s husband]). Jeconiah and Shealtiel are known only in genealogy lists; Zerubbabel was the leader of the exiles who returned from Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem.
5. If David died in 971 B.C. (See *SDA Bible Commentary* vol. 2, p. 77, 143.) and if Jesus was born in 5 B.C., (See *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 242.) then there is a period of 966 years involved. If there were 41 generations (Luke’s count), they would have an average generational age of 23-24 years. This seems more likely than the 37 years suggested by Matthew’s 26 generations. Furthermore, it is possible to show from Old Testament lists that Matthew left out at least 4 known ancestors: 1) Ahaziah, 2) Joash, 3) Amaziah, and 4) Jehoiakim. The first three (Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah) were of the royal line but were wicked descendants (2 Chronicles 22:3-4; 24:17-18; 25:14-16) of Ahab and Jezebel (2 Chronicles 22-25) through Athaliah who introduced Baal worship to Jerusalem. (2 Kings

11:18) Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:6) (also know as Jechonias [Matthew 1:11], Jeconiah [1 Chronicles 3:16], and Coniah [Jeremiah 22:24]) was left out between Josiah and Jehoiachin. It is quite possible that the name of Jehoiakim in Matthew 1:11 may have been left out by a copyist because it was so much like the name of his son (Jehoiachin) who proceeded him in the list.

6. Abbreviated genealogy lists are given elsewhere in the Bible for famous individuals such as Ezra. (Ezra 7:1,5) Abbreviated genealogies were also given by virtual contemporaries of Jesus—the Jewish philosopher Philo and the Jewish historian Josephus—which they apparently considered to be adequate to prove their lineage! Thus, it is quite likely that several (up to 10 or more) of the lesser known ancestors of Jesus who lived between the times of the Old Testament and the New Testament were left out by Matthew simply because he did not think it was necessary to give an exhaustive and detailed list.
7. Inter-marriage within the royal line could fairly easily account for two or more lines being traceable through all those centuries.
8. Among Hebrews the terms *father*, *son*, *brother*, *sister*, *mother*, and *daughter* were used more broadly than in English. (See Genesis 29:12; Numbers 10:29; Deuteronomy 15:2; 1 Chronicles 2:7.) Thus, *son* could be a person of natural descent (immediate or more remote), a person “adopted” or linked by “levirate marriage,” (Deuteronomy 25:5-9) or in some cases simply by association or character. (2 Timothy 1:2)
9. There are two major possible explanations for the differences we see in these lists. Matthew may have been giving the ancestors of Joseph while Luke the physician was giving the more biologically correct lineage through Mary. It is possible that if Mary was the only child of her parents, then Joseph would be considered their legal heir. (Compare Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1-13; Joshua 17:3-6.) Or, Joseph could have been adopted (assuming he was the biological son of “Jacob”) by “Heli,” thus, giving Jesus two “legal” ancestral lines.
10. It is quite possible that Heli which would be Eli in Hebrew or Aramaic was Mary’s real father who may have “adopted” Joseph as a “step-son” to give him the right to inherit his property if Mary was his only daughter.

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