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MINISTRIES

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Examining the Genealogy of Yeshua

Counter-missionaries claim that the New Testament writings are utterly contradictory and therefore unreliable. They cite several objections to the genealogies of Yeshua given in Matthew and Luke to make their case. It’s argued that the genealogies contradict each other and that there are multiple other issues that disqualify Yeshua as Messiah. How do we as believers in Yeshua the Messiah answer these objections?

Before we dive in, if you haven’t seen our teaching, **Why Yeshua is the Messiah**, we recommend watching that teaching first. In that teaching, we make a positive case for why Yeshua is the only possible candidate for Israel’s Messiah according to Scripture.

Regarding the topic at hand, it’s first worth pointing out that the writers of the gospels *really believed* in what they were writing. Their goal was to prove to their readers that Yeshua is the Messiah of Israel. In his book, “*On Guard*,” professional philosopher and theologian, Dr. William Lane Craig, writes:

“No modern scholar thinks of the gospels as bald-faced lies, the result of a massive conspiracy. The only places you find such conspiracy theories are on atheist Web sites and in sensationalist books and movies. When you read the pages of the New Testament, there’s no doubt that these people sincerely believed in the truth of what they proclaimed.”

-Dr. William Lane Craig, “On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision”

Since the authors of the gospels really believed what they wrote, and they were dedicated to proving the truth of their claims, it’s simply unreasonable to suggest that they would have preserved and spread contradictory accounts of Yeshua’s ancestry. We can reasonably assume that collectively they would have not made such an obvious mistake.

If these genealogies were really as problematic as counter-missionaries have claimed, why would the authors of the gospels, who truly believed in Yeshua’s Messiahship with all their hearts, mess up such a crucial detail and never correct it? Furthermore, why would the early Messianic community affirm these genealogies and pass on the gospels containing them *in support of their beliefs* if they contained contradictions?

Semitic language scholar and Messianic Jew, Dr. Michael Brown, echoes these criticisms of the counter-missionary argument:

“It is certainly ironic that the same people who often claim that the New Testament writers rewrote the story of Yeshua’s life to create the (allegedly false) impression that the events of his life corresponded to biblical prophecy also claim that two of the principle authors—in fact, the primary “historians” of the New Testament—preserved two hopelessly contradictory and self-defeating genealogies, Matthew starting his book with his ancestral record and Luke giving a special place in his book to a lengthy genealogical record. Added to this is the supposition that the editors and copyists carefully preserved and passed on these contradictory accounts—and not one early church leader ever thought of changing this. Now *this* is special pleading.”

-Dr. Michael Brown, Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: Vol. 4

The simplest answer to these apparent inconsistencies is that the problem lies with *us*, not with Matthew and Luke. Perhaps we ought to approach these texts with a little more humility and clear thinking. Nevertheless, when we read these accounts, some reasonable questions arise.

Matthew’s account of Yeshua’s genealogy is in Chapter 1 at the very beginning of his gospel. Luke’s account of Yeshua’s genealogy appears in chapter 3 of his gospel, beginning in verse 23. Let’s take a look at the two lists in order beginning with King David, which is when we begin to see a divergence take place.

Matthew 1	Luke 3
David	David
Solomon	Nathan
Rehoboam	Mattatha
Abijah	Menna
Asaph	Melea
Jehoshaphat	Eliakim
Joram	Jonam
Uzziah	Joseph
Jotham	Judah
Ahaz	Simeon
Hezekiah	Levi
Manasseh	Matthat
Amos	Jorim
Josiah	Eliezer
Jechoniah	Joshua
Shealtiel	Er
Zerubbabel	Elmadam
Abiud	Cosam
Eliakim	Addi
Azor	Melchi
Zadok	Neri
Achim	Shealtiel
Eliud	Zerubbabel
Eleazar	Rhesa
Matthan	Joanan

Jacob	Joda
Joseph	Josech
Yeshua	Semein
	Mattathias
	Maath
	Naggai
	Esli
	Nahum
	Amos
	Mattathias
	Maath
	Naggai
	Esli
	Nahum
	Amos
	Mattathias
	Joseph
	Jannai
	Melki
	Levi
	Matthat
	Heli
	Joseph
	Yeshua

Between these two genealogies, the first difference you'll notice is that Luke's list has almost twice as many names as Matthew's. In Matthew, the complete list of names beginning with Abraham is forty-one, whereas Luke's complete list contains seventy-one names beginning with Adam. Why is that?

Well in the Bible, authors sometimes would list every name in a genealogy. But other times, they would skip over generations in order to have a shorter list highlighting the most important individuals.

Dr. Walter Kaiser Jr., an Old Testament scholar, gives an example of this:

“...the same high priestly line of Aaron appears in 1 Chronicles 6:3-14 and Ezra 7:1-5, but it has twenty-two generations and names in Chronicles, while Ezra only has sixteen names. When the two lists are placed side by side, it is clear that Ezra deliberately skipped from the eighth name to the fifteenth name, thereby abridging his list, but in a way that was legitimate within the traditions of Scripture. **This is exactly what is illustrated in the lists in Matthew.**

-Dr. Walter Kaiser, “*Hard Sayings of the Bible*,” p. 50

Indeed, if counter-missionaries have a problem with the difference between the two genealogies concerning the total number of names, then in order to be consistent, they must apply the same criticism to the genealogies listed in the *TANAKH*. So there's not really an issue here unless counter-missionaries are prepared to throw out the *TANAKH* on this same basis.

Another difference between these genealogies is that Matthew's list follows a line that passes from David to his son Solomon while Luke's list passes from David to his other son, Nathan, hence the several different names in each list. But is this a contradiction? Not at all! Matthew is simply giving

Yeshua's genealogy through his adopted father Joseph, while Luke gives his genealogy through his mother Mary. So this isn't really a problem.

Some might object to the genealogy in Luke going through Nathan instead of Solomon. It is claimed that the Messiah must be a descendant of David through his son Solomon; therefore the genealogy in Luke is useless.

But this objection is simply without basis. Nowhere in the *TANAKH* are there unconditional promises given to Solomon regarding Messiah coming from his lineage. The Messiah was prophesied to be a son of David, not Solomon.

Note that it was said there were no *unconditional* promises given to Solomon. Counter-missionaries like to point to 2 Samuel 7:13-17 about God establishing Solomon's kingdom forever. But when we look at 1 Chronicles 28:7, we see that this promise was clearly conditional upon Solomon's faithfulness to God:

1 Chronicles 28:7

"I will establish his kingdom forever if he continues strong in keeping my commandments and my rules, as he is today."

We all know the story. Solomon did not continue strong in keeping God's commandments:

1 Kings 11:9-13

"And the LORD (YHWH) was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord (YHWH), the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. **But he did not keep what the LORD (YHWH) commanded. Therefore the LORD (YHWH) said to Solomon, "Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, **I will surely tear the kingdom from you** and will give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen."**

Again, it's David's throne that remains established forever, not Solomon's. Therefore, there's no reason to dismiss the genealogy in Luke since it clearly traces Yeshua's genealogy to David, which is the primary point. There's no biblical requirement to go through Solomon. Such a "requirement" is merely pulled out of thin air by counter-missionaries.

Another objection to Luke's account is that Luke traces Yeshua's ancestry through His mother, Mary. It is claimed that tribal affiliation goes only through the father, not the mother.

However, this claim is demonstrably false. First, the Torah says that if a father only has daughters and no sons, and he dies, the family inheritance is passed on through his daughters:

Numbers 27:8

"And you shall speak to the people of Israel, saying, 'If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter.'"

It's true that this commandment doesn't address genealogy specifically, but the concept of passing on family inheritance is certainly related in principle.

Second, we have an example in the *TANAKH* of genealogy continuing through a woman:

1 Chronicles 2:34-36

“Now Sheshan had no sons, only daughters, but Sheshan had an Egyptian slave whose name was Jarha. So Sheshan **gave his daughter in marriage to Jarha his slave, and she bore him Attai. Attai fathered Nathan, and Nathan fathered Zabad.**”

The list of names continues on for many more verses, but right here is *conclusive proof* that genealogy can continue through women. This genealogy passed through Sheshan’s daughter who married an Egyptian slave and then it passed through to the daughter’s children!

Still counter-missionaries might object to Matthew’s genealogy of Yeshua on the basis of Yeshua’s descendant, Jehoniah, known in the *TANAKH* by the name Jehoiachin. A passage in Jeremiah says that God cursed Jehoiachin and his children:

Jeremiah 22:24-25,30

“As I live, declares the Lord (YHWH), though Coniah the son of Jehoiachin, king of Judah, were the signet ring on my right hand, yet I would tear you off and give you in the hand of those who seek your life, into the hand of those of whom you are afraid, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of the Chaldeans [...] Thus says the Lord (YHWH): Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for **none of his of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah.**”

Based on this passage, it is argued that Yeshua cannot be the Messiah because He comes from the cursed line of Jehoiachin.

First of all, when we look a little later in Jeremiah, we see evidence that Jehoiachin actually repented of his sin:

Jeremiah 52:31-34

“And in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month, Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, graciously freed Jehoiachin king of Judah and brought him out of prison. And he spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat above the seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put off his prison garments. And every day of his life he dined regularly at the king’s table, and for his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, according to his daily needs, until the day of his death, as long as he lived.”

On the basis of this passage and the complete reversal of Jehoiachin’s circumstances—from prison to the king’s table—scholars and even the Talmudic rabbis argue that Jehoiachin had repented.

Furthermore, if we look in the Book of Haggai, we find that God appears to have reversed this curse. After the exile, Zerubbabel, Jehoiachin’s grandson, became the governor of Judah:

Haggai 2:20-23

“The word of the Lord (YHWH) came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, “Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and

the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother. On that day, declares the Lord (YHWH) of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord (YHWH), **and make you like a signet ring**, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord (YHWH) of hosts.”

You’ll notice the use of the term “signet ring” in both Jeremiah and Haggai. In Jeremiah, YHWH told Jehoiachin that he was a signet ring on the His hand, and yet YHWH tore him off and gave him into the hand of the Babylonians. Then after the exile, YHWH tells Jehoiachin’s grandson, Zerubbabel, that He has made him to be like the Lord’s “signet ring.”

The use of this term is not a coincidence. In this passage, God is telling us that the curse on Jehoiachin had been reversed.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle with the genealogies is that both Matthew and Luke list Shealtiel as the father of Zerubbabel. And yet, Matthew states that Jechoniah is the father of Shealtiel while Luke states that Neri is the father of Shealtiel. How do we deal with this apparent discrepancy?

This issue is easily resolved when you consider that the Shealtiel and Zerubbabel of Matthew’s list are *not the same* Shealtiel and Zerubbabel of Luke’s list. It’s easy to see why some people would assume that they are the same people, but there’s really no reason to assume that.

In his book, *Jesus’ Title to the Throne of David*, theologian W. W. Barndollar writes:

“We must consider Salathiel and Zerubabel [sic] in one genealogy as different than the men by the same names in the other genealogy. It is not at all impossible nor unusual for blood relatives in the same generation to have the same names—it has been true in the past and it is true in our own day. In the days of David we read of two descendants from Levi who bore the same name, Elkana. The one was a Korhite known as one of David’s ‘mighty men, helpers of the war (1 Chr. 12:1-6), while the other was a Levite assigned as a door-keeper for the Ark (1 Chr. 15:22-23). Therefore, the identical names in Matthew’s and Luke’s genealogies present no great problem, for there is no good reason why they are not different individuals even through having the same name.”

-W.W. Barndollar, *“Jesus’ Title to the Throne of David: A Study in Biblical Eschatology,”* p. 36

As we can see, if the Shealtiel and Zerubbabel of Matthew’s list is different than the men by the same names in Luke’s list, there is no contradiction at all. Problem solved.

However, even if we assume that they *are* the same, this apparent contradiction is easily resolved once we consider the possibility that there may have been a Levirate marriage. A Levirate marriage occurs when a husband dies childless and therefore his brother or near relative marries his widow. The first son born from the Levirate marriage would be the legal heir of the deceased husband. This practice is outlined in the Torah:

Deuteronomy 25:5

“If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. **And the first son whom she**

bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.”

So in the case of Matthew and Luke’s genealogies, it’s possible that Shealtiel was born from a Levirate marriage. He would be legally descended from Jechoniah via Levirate marriage, but would be the biological descendant of Neri. Admittedly this cannot be proven, but it’s at least a possibility that would resolve the apparent contradiction between the two passages.

Still other possibilities exist if we assume Shealtiel and Zerubbabel are the same people in both genealogies. For instance, Shealtiel could be Neri’s descendant *by marriage* and Jeconiah’s descendant by blood. Again, this can’t be proven, but it’s a possibility.

Each of these perspectives have reasonable arguments and support among scholars. However, one thing is clear: The apparent inconsistencies between the two genealogies are not insurmountable but have several plausible resolutions.

In conclusion, counter-missionaries overstate their case by appealing to the apparent discrepancies between the two genealogies of Yeshua given in Matthew and in Luke. The technical issues to work through in Matthew and Luke and not uncommon to what we also find in the *TANAKH*. Furthermore, whatever issues might exist have several plausible resolutions. Not only that, but it’s far-fetched to assert that hopelessly contradictory accounts of Yeshua’s ancestry would be proudly affirmed and passed on among the early Messianic community and throughout Church history. Therefore, this objection to Yeshua simply doesn’t hold water.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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