

Jesus' Genealogy --- Let the Genie out of the Jar!

One of the obstacles blocking Jews coming to faith in Yeshua (i.e. Jesus) is "the inaccurate genealogy" of Yeshua listed in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. If Yeshua was born of the virgin Mary, without a natural father, then he is disqualified from being their Messiah. According to the Hebrew Scriptures, Messiah must be a *physical* descendant of King David. Clearly, these are critical matters for any Jew considering the authenticity of Yeshua as Messiah.

There is no denying it: There are massive challenges facing any serious reader of Matthew's and Luke's genealogies, whether we be Jew or Gentile. This is not to mention how tedious, even *boring* --- all the "begats" are! Various attempts have been made to harmonize the obvious differences, to circumnavigate seeming contradictions, and to eliminate the supernatural elements of the "virgin birth". So, I readily admit to my Jewish friends, and to all of us "others", this has been a vexed issue. Debate has been furious.

So, how shall we tiptoe through this minefield where opinions are buried so deep? Well, the first thing I would suggest is that each of us needs a good dose of grace. I realize that I do not hold every piece in the puzzle. You may also not be seeing certain critical elements. Each of us may be smuggling in un-tested presuppositions. And let's be honest: None of us has knowledge that is full and perfect. We need robust discussion seasoned with grace.

Why Messiah's Genealogy Matters.

From the very beginning --- when God promised Eve one of her "seed" (i.e. a direct descendant or offspring) would rescue fallen humanity --- Biblical genealogy was critical (Gen. 3:15).

You will recall this promise was spoken directly by God Himself to our Enemy, the Serpent, who is later revealed as the Devil (Rev. 20:2). As the Seed of the woman, Messiah had to come out of humanity, and you can "bet your bottom dollar" that from that moment on, Satan made up his mind to thwart the Plan. He would do his nefarious best to muddy the pure

genealogical waters from Eve to stop the coming "Seed" from crushing him. How so?

Noah.

Enter the half-bred hybrid Nephilim of Genesis chapter six. Whatever Gentile commentary may say about the union of "the sons of God" with "the daughters of men" there is ancient and consistent testimony from Jewish sources that "the sons of God" were wicked angels. Old Rabbinic exegesis says this is an account of the unholy union by fallen angels with antediluvian mankind. The resultant "offspring" were the Nephilim that God destroyed by the Flood (Gen. 6:4). Why such a drastic response by the Almighty? It appears there was more to it than the violence of that generation (Gen. 6: 5).

Here is, I suggest, early proof that Satan took the promise of "the Seed of the woman" seriously. He will stop at nothing to thwart the prophecy of his fate. The inter-marriage of Satan's seed with Adam's race was his audacious attempt to circumvent the divine judgment decreed in Genesis 3:15. Is it too great an

assumption that in all probability there was only one pure human-bred family left on the earth? Note:

“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God. And Noah became the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth” (Gen. 6:8-10).

Noah must have been a good guy, because our modern versions tell us *three times* over that Noah was “a righteous man”, “blameless in his time”, and he “walked with God” (v.9). For once however, the old King James Version is probably more accurate:

“These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.”

This puts the emphasis not only on Noah’s character (important as that is), but also on his genealogy. The NKJV and NASB do

better by starting verse 9 as, "This is the genealogy of Noah," or "These are the records of the generations of Noah." For what reason did Noah "find favour" in the eyes of the LORD"? Rather than repeating three times that Noah's good character was the only reason, we are to know the text is equally concerned with Noah's family tree, that is, his genealogy.

Notice also, the plural "generations". If you go back to Genesis 5 you discover this statement refers to the pedigree of Noah and his sons stretching back to Adam. Noah is a true human descendant of Adam (and Eve). This is why we read in Genesis 6:9 that Noah was "perfect in his generations" (KJV). Noah was of pure Adamic stock, that is, "perfect in the record of his genealogy"! (We know Noah was not perfect in his character as his subsequent failures demonstrate.) But he did have complete integrity "in his generations", that is, in his genealogy.

Noah found favour with God for two reasons: He was a righteous man of faith through whom God's purpose of rescue

will be fulfilled through his pure pedigree. Putting it negatively, there were no half-bred humans or alien Nephilim in Noah's ancestry.

So, to preserve the integrity of the divine promise to Eve, God had to rescue Noah and his family from the contagion of the evil genes that were so successfully contaminating the human race. (Sci-fi movies eat your hearts out!) How near Satan came to succeeding is astonishing. The Flood was critical to fulfilling God's promise to save mankind by a future [*human*] child of Adam & Eve's. (1)

The rest of the Biblical record is a summary of how God further refined the identity of the coming redeemer. Not only would Messiah be "the seed of the woman", that is a member of the human family, but he would also be of the Seed of Abraham, a Hebrew.

The promise was subsequently further refined. Messiah must come from a particular family, or tribe, of the Hebrews. He must spring from Jacob, then from the

Seed of Judah. And it gets even more streamlined for he must come from one family line within the tribe of Judah. He must be of the Seed, or family, of David.

What an amazing record the Hebrew Scriptures have left us. Some commentators say every name before David (Adam to David) and every name after David (David to Zerubbabel) is revealed in the OT genealogies pointing to Messiah. If so this is astounding! We owe so much to the faithfulness of the Jews who preserved and meticulously transferred the sacred Scriptures for us.

Jeconiah's Curse.

There came a time in Israel's history when the challenge for genealogical purity became even more acute. One of Solomon's sons, Jeconiah by name, was cursed by God and told:

"Thus says the LORD, 'Write this man down childless, a man who will not prosper in his days; For no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in

Judah'" (Jer. 22:30).

Jeconiah's curse is repeated later:

"Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah, 'He shall have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night'" (Jer. 36:30).

Even though he was a direct descendant of David and Solomon, no descendant of Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, would have the right to the throne of David. Until Jeremiah, the first requirement for messianic lineage was to be of the house of David. After Jeremiah, it was narrowed still further. Now one had to be not only of the house of David, but apart from Jeconiah's family tree!

As an aside, but still relevant, many have failed to understand why God gave Israel such strict guidelines on marriage. What's so bad about a Jewish boy marrying a nice Gentile girl? What's so bad about mixing

ethnicity in the OT? Well, understanding the need for purity of the generations to Messiah is the key. God's promises to Eve, Abraham, and David (apart from Jeconiah) must not fail.

Matthew's Genealogy.

It's right here that we have to let the Genie out of the jar of Jesus' genealogy! Are we game to pop the cork? There are so many divergent ideas about Matthew's list that it would take a book to do them all justice. Here are a few of what I consider to be the salient points.

According to the majority of Christian commentary Matthew lists Joseph's ancestry: Huge problem on a number of counts! Messiah could not arise from Mary's husband Joseph because his blood-line runs through Jeconiah from Solomon (Matt. 1:11). We have already noted the curse God Himself put on Jeconiah ... no Messianic king would ever come from him!

Neither could Yeshua claim the right to David's throne by virtue of his adoption by Joseph his legal father, as some

commentators have suggested. Although Yeshua was born in wedlock and 'adopted' by Joseph the husband of Mary, the fact is that genealogical blood-lines *cannot* be passed on through adoption.

This is very much a reason many Jews cannot accept Yeshua as their Messiah. Not having a natural father from David, through Solomon, apart from Jeconiah, would automatically dismiss his claims to being their messiah and king. Remember, it was the father's genealogy that determined both national and tribal identity ... not the mother's.

There are at least two probable solutions to this conundrum. The Messianic Jew, Dr Arnold Fruchtenbaum (2) states the purpose of Matthew's genealogy is to show why Yeshua could not be the Messiah if he were really Joseph's natural son. For this reason, he says, Matthew presents the Jeconiah problem, and then proceeds with the account of the virgin birth which, from Matthew's viewpoint, is the solution to the Jeconiah curse. Joseph is not Yeshua's natural father ... problem solved! Really?

“And to Jacob was born Joseph the husband of Mary, from whom Jesus was born, he who is called Christ (i.e. the Messiah” (Matt.1:16).

The long awaited Messiah arrives, but instead of following the usual pattern of a genealogy through a father’s line, Jesus’ birth is spoken of in relation to his mother.

Mary is not described as being the wife of Joseph. No! Joseph is described as being “the husband of Mary”! The [legal] father is promptly put into the background. The reason is there is something staggeringly unusual about Mary’s son ... all conventional practice of ancestry lineage is side-stepped at the climax of Matthew’s genealogy for he is miraculously conceived by the power of the Spirit of God!

It’s fair to say this “Christian” explanation does not at all satisfy Jewish concerns. Even if they were to grant the virgin birth (which they do not), they object that Messiah must come through the male line from the non-Jeconiah tree within the tribe of Judah, and Matthew says Jeconiah is Joseph’s ancestor!

Joseph Who?

Uriel ben Mordechai, (3) a Hebrew-speaking Jewish believer in Yeshua as Messiah, presents a great argument to help us here. He says that the Joseph whom Matthew lists here is not Mary's husband but her ***father!*** How so?

Firstly, the Greek of Matthew 1:16 may legitimately read either that Joseph was "the husband of Mary" or that Joseph was "the man of Mary." The word *aneer* means a male person of full age and stature, a man who may be a husband or a father. Thus, states Uriel, the man or head of Mary could refer to her father. Given that Joseph was a very common Jewish name, is Matthew telling us that Mary's father was also called Joseph?

Tribal affiliation in Jewish law can only be passed through the father and never the mother. However, family affiliation can be and is traced through the mother *provided* that her father is from the same family line as her husband. Thus it is not strictly true to say that a woman cannot pass on tribal identification. Where Messiah's ancestry is concerned, a woman can possess the tribal

identification, *provided* she is the first generation daughter only of a man from the tribe of Judah.

In this way a grandfather may pass his tribal identification directly to his grandson when he produces a daughter who gives him a grandson. A second generation daughter loses this tribal ability.

So, if Matthew is saying, “Joseph was the father of Mary” then Yeshua’s tribal identification is legitimate because it comes directly through his grandfather Joseph’s first generation daughter Mary! (Early Hebrew and Aramaic translations of Matthew’s Gospel confirm that the Joseph referred to here is Mary’s father.) (4)

*All of this is to say that Matthew’s genealogy is **not** that of Mary’s husband Joseph, but is actually the genealogy of Mary through her father!*

But this still does not solve the problem of grandfather Joseph’s blood-line coming through the cursed Jeconiah. Whether the Joseph connected to Mary is her husband or her father, Messiah cannot come through the accursed Jeconiah. Is there a way out of this?

Once again Uriel helps: King Josiah had a son named Jehoiakim, who in turn had a son named Jeconiah, who was the 'cursed' King. But this is not the Jeconiah in Matthew's list. Uriel argues from the Hebrew Scriptures, that King Josiah's first-born son should have been King. He was originally named Yochanan, but Yochanan was given a new name Jeconiah, and then deported to Babylon (along with the famous Daniel) and served in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar. This Yochanan *aka* Jeconiah then has a son, named She'alti'el, who in turn fathers Zerubbabel, who is the one who leads the Jewish people back to the land of Israel, to rebuild the Temple, and become the first governor of the people of Judah, back in the Land of Israel.

Bottom line: The Jeconiah of Matthew 1:11 is not the cursed king. Indeed, Messiah's line does not need to go through Solomon at all! Whether the Joseph of Matthew 1:16 is Mary's father or her husband, the point is his blood-line does not pass through the cursed Jeconiah. (5) & (6)

Luke's Contribution.

Luke's Gospel, on the other hand, details the lineage of Mary's husband Joseph through David's son Nathan (Luke 3:31). Nathan is not from Solomon, thus avoiding Jeconiah's curse altogether. It is clear that the Joseph who is the son of Jacob mentioned in Matthew 1:16 and the Joseph who is the son of Eli (also spelled Heli) cited in Luke 3:23 are two different men with two distinct genealogical lines back to David. The fact that Mary marries a man named Joseph, which also happens to be the name of her father, was not uncommon in ancient Israel. Luke's genealogy would seem to confirm Uriel's contention that the Messianic line need not pass through Solomon at all, but through Nathan from David. (7)

Did Joseph Sleep With Mary Before They were Married?

Although I agree with Uriel ben Mordechai so far, in my humble opinion he then goes way too far in trying to come to grips with the NT witness of the supernatural conception of Yeshua by the Spirit of God.

Uriel speculates that the text of Matthew, properly understood, without the standard Hellenistic church pre-supposition of the Virgin Birth, does not imply with any certainty that Joseph and Mary never had sexual relations before her pregnancy with Yeshua.

Uriel argues (he is by no means the first to do so) that after the angel's visit Mary could have very easily gone to Joseph and slept with him. This suggestion is highly problematic for a number of reasons, not to mention the trouble for example, that Abraham got into by trying to 'help' God bring about Isaac's miraculous birth by sleeping with his wife's handmaid, Hagar!

Firstly, this is pure supposition without any textual support. To say Mary could have gone to sleep with Joseph is surely an assault upon the record Matthew and Luke give? In fact, I will show below it is contrary to the text.

Secondly, as Uriel notes, Joseph was a just man and a follower of Torah. My question then is: Is secretly sleeping with one's

betrothed, before the wedding, the actions of a follower of Torah?

Thirdly, even if this did happen, how does Uriel explain Joseph's incredulity when he learns Mary is pregnant? If he had slept with her, her pregnancy would be no surprise to Joseph, surely?

Fourthly, Uriel's suggestion that Joseph and Mary, "at that point practised abstention, and didn't have sexual contact again until the birth of their first-born child", is pure speculation and in fact, contrary to what the text says; "he knew her not until ..." (Matt. 1:25). The straight reading of the text is Joseph did not know Mary sexually until after Yeshua's birth. Period. It does *not* say, "he knew her not *again* until she gave birth to a son"! I think the English translations here do a reasonable job of rendering the intent as, Joseph "kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a son..." (Matt. 1:25).

Finally, the text plainly says the one begotten in Mary was the result of "a [the] holy Spirit". Is an "illegitimate" Messiah the result of a holy union? (This is not meant to cast an aspersion on those born out of

wedlock, but in this case we are talking about two persons said to be highly favoured and blessed by God, because they are righteous, Torah-observant people.)

I would add another interesting aside. Matthew tells us that Joseph, after discovering Mary's pregnancy "considered this..." (Matt. 1:20). Whilst this word 'considered' is a legitimate translation of *enthumeomai* there is another intriguing possibility.

Just a little over in Matt. 2:16 king Herod upon learning of the trickery of the Magi "became very *enraged*". This time the word is not translated as "considered". Context would rule out any rational level-headed consideration by Herod here.

Again, over in Matthew 9:4 Jesus knowing the thoughts of his enemies, said to those contemplating his murder, "Why are you *thinking* evil in your hearts?" Given the context here, it might justifiably be better to understand these people were not just coolly contemplating murder! They were filled with anger for murderous intent.

Then, in Luke 4:28 where the citizens of Jesus' hometown rose up in the synagogue to cast him out, we are told they "were filled with *rage* as they heard these things." They intended to hurl Jesus over a cliff to his death. Evidently they did not sit there, arms folded, dispassionately contemplating their next move.

So, what was Joseph's state of mind when he learns of his beautiful Mary now being pregnant? Coolly considering, or inwardly fuming with justifiable anger? If we put the clues of the text all together, it seems Joseph is fuming because he feels betrayed. His betrothed virgin and pure girl has been playing around! He is incredulous.

So, because of his righteous anger, Joseph the good man gets a visit from the angel of the LORD to explain this state of affairs. Without God's intervention and explanation Joseph would not have known the child was begotten through the action of the holy Spirit, that is, by the *Ruach Adonai*.

The rest of the story hints Mary believes she will *immediately* fall pregnant ... remember Gabriel visited her "in the sixth month" of her cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy (Luke 1:26, 36). Then Mary, "at this time arose and went with haste ... and entered the house of Zacharias, and greeted Elizabeth" (vs. 39-40).

The very moment Mary crosses their threshold Elizabeth pronounces a blessing on "the mother of my lord (Messiah)" (v.43). The conception has already taken place in Mary's womb! Mary remains there for the next 3 months (v.56), and this is likely the months when Joseph marries her.

But "he kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a son ..." (Matt. 1:25)!

The straight-forward reading of these facts, along with clear statements such as in Matthew 1:18 and Luke 1:35, makes it clear that Mary had her firstborn son by supernatural means. Or did she? Many still protest!

Oh dear, I think I just took the cork out the bottle and let the genie out! (TBC)

FOOTNOTES.

1. I deal more fully with some of the difficulties and objections to this view in *They Never Told Me This in Church!* 332pp.
2. <http://www.jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/v05-n06/genealogy>
3. I am indebted to Paul Herring for this information. See his website articles <http://circumcisedheart.info/The%20Messiah%20from%20an%20Hebraic%20perspective.pdf>
4. Ibid, p.16. The interested reader can view actual manuscript evidence in Paul Herring's website article.
5. Ibid, see Paul Herring's article at footnote 3. I have transliterated the personal names to make them more readable for those who are not familiar with their Hebrew equivalents.
6. Ibid, In Herring's footnotes number 30 on p.17 we read: "In the Babylonian Talmud, Kritot 5b we can read of a discussion about the sons of Yoshiyahu and how their names were changed. Here's part of it: *"And Jehoahaz by reason of the claim to the throne by his brother Jehoiakim who was two years his senior'. 'Was he indeed older, is it not written: And the sons of Josiah: the first-born Yochanan, the second*

Johoiakim, the third Zedekiah and the fourth Shallum; upon which R. Johanan remarked that Johanan was identical with Jehoahaz and Zedekiah with Shallum! — Jehoiakim was indeed older, and [the other] was called first-born, because he was first in succession. But is it permitted to install the younger son in preference to the older? Is it not written: And the kingdom he gave to Jehorom for he was the first-born? — That one followed in his forefather's footsteps. The Master said: 'Shallum is identical with Zedekiah'. But are not the sons enumerated in numerical order? He [Zedekiah] is called 'the third' because he was the third among the sons, and he is called 'the fourth', because he was the fourth to reign, for Jeconiah reigned before him: Jehoahaz was the first successor, then followed Jehoiakim, then Jeconiah and then Zedekiah. Our Rabbis taught: Shallum is identical with Zedekiah; and why was he called Shallum? Because he was perfect ['shalem'] in his deeds; or according to another explanation, because the kingdom of the House of David ended [shalem] in his days."

7. It is quite permissible in Greek grammar to use a definite article before a proper name ("the" Matthew, "the" Luke, "the" Mary). However, in the Greek text of Luke's genealogy, every single name mentioned has the Greek definite article with one exception: The name of Joseph (Luke 3:23). Someone reading the original would understand by the missing definite article from Joseph's name that this was not really Joseph's genealogy, but his wife Mary's. Furthermore, although many translations of Luke 3:23 read: "...being supposedly the son of Joseph, the son of Eli...", because of the missing Greek definite article before the name of Joseph, that same verse could be translated as follows: "Being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph the son of Heli...". In other words, the final parenthesis could be expanded so that the verse reads that although Yeshua was "supposed" or assumed to be the descendant of Joseph, he was really the descendant of Heli the father of Mary. The absence of Mary's name is quite in keeping with the Jewish practices on genealogies. The Jerusalem Talmud recognized this genealogy to be that of Mary and not

Joseph and refers to Mary as the daughter of Heli (Hagigah 2:4).