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BIBLE CLASS

THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST

IN the first verse of the New Testament is preserved the purpose of God in His Son Jesus, for he is there presented as the Seed of David and Abraham. As Seed of David Jesus is the promised King who will reign in righteousness on the holy hill of Zion; and as the Seed of Abraham, he will bring blessedness to all nations. The message of the verse therefore is "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this *shall be* a sign unto you; you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men". And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord has made known unto us. (Luke 2:11-15)

This opening verse has been described as the genealogy of Jesus in three names. Interpreting it in this way, the second phrase "the son of" describes David's relationship to Abraham.

THE THREE DIVISIONS

The 17th verse makes an analysis of the generations from Abraham to Christ into three groups of fourteen each—from Abraham to David, from David to the carrying away into captivity, and from the carrying away into captivity unto Christ. It calls attention to three groups of fourteen which are to be reckoned in a manner plainly prescribed. The first fourteen begins with Abraham, the second begins with David, and the third with the carrying away unto Babylon. This means that David is the last name in the first group, and that he is again counted in the second group. But this introduces no difficulty, for such are the instructions given: "from Abraham to David" includes Abraham, and therefore "from David, etc." includes David. In this way also the

problem of how forty-one names give three groups of fourteen is solved. This example illustrates the truth of the saying that the Bible is its own interpreter, a saying which finds further illustration in this very chapter, and in connection with these same groups.

The second fourteen generations are said to extend from David until the carrying away into Babylon. Counting from David, then, the fourteenth name is found to be Josiah; and Josiah lived and died before the captivity. How is this to be explained? Again, the answer, as suggested, is by reading carefully, especially the eleventh verse. There the name of Josiah, who reigned with power before the Babylonian conquest, is nevertheless connected with that conquest: “And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren *about the time they were carried away to Babylon.*” This approximation of time duly noted should prepare the reader for the place of division with a king who was near to the captivity, though not actually experiencing it.

Consideration of the three fourteens must provoke a desire to know the fullest meaning of this division. Of the first group only David was king; in the second everyone had reigned; the third represented the line from the captivity to Christ. And here perhaps may be suggested the reason why Josiah’s name should be coupled with the captivity. He was the last king of Judah to reign independently. After his death, Jehoahaz was not allowed to reign more than three months, before “Pharaoh-nechoh put him in bonds at Riblah in the land of Hamath,” and placed another in his stead, even Eliakim, his brother (2 Kings 23:31 . . .). So the glory of Jerusalem which had been often beclouded through the evils of the people was eclipsed by the invader. It was the beginning of the end. Nebuchadnezzar was soon to come to overturn, overturn, overturn the throne and the kingdom, and make the land desolate.

NAMES OMITTED

Further study of this genealogy discloses the fact that the names of four kings in the line are omitted. These are Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah

and Jehoiakim. The first three of these kings represent the three generations which followed the marriage of Joram with Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel; for the son of good Jehoshaphat had married the daughter of that cruel pair with terrible results to Judah. Athaliah was a true daughter to Jezebel. She introduced Baal's worship to the land, as her mother had done in Israel, and at the death of Ahaziah her son, had massacred the seed royal that she might reign herself. All these consequences provide an eloquent testimony to the evil which wicked women have wrought, and Israel's history is full of such testimony. Now these three kings, direct descendants of Jezebel, through Athaliah are left out, and the relationship has been put forward as the explanation. What is again interesting about these three is that each of them died a violent death. Ahaziah was slain by the avenging Jehu, (2 Kings 9:27) while conspirators were responsible for the death of Joash (2 Kings 12:20) and of Amaziah (2 Kings 14:19).

The other royal name omitted is Jehoiakim, and preceding remarks may be found to afford some clue to why he is left out. The margins of the Authorized and Revised Versions indicate that some manuscripts include his name. Such inclusion would raise the number of names in the group to fifteen, which of course is impossible apart from other manuscript corrections not suggested.

Reverting to the fierce cruelty of Athaliah we consider how near came this monstrous woman to the accomplishment of her purpose of exterminating all the seed royal. How exciting the rescue of the young prince Joash by his aunt Jehosheba, and the long concealment by her husband, the faithful high priest Jehoiada. We have said "how near," and it was near when regarded from a human standpoint; but really it was very far. The covenant of God stood between the wrath of the queen and the life of the young heir, and all that watchful care which Jehoiada exercised was a remarkable evidence of the ways of Providence. David's seed had to be preserved.

When we read of that ruthless Babylonian invasion, another example of special interposition by God comes to light. Josiah's son Jehoahaz

had already been taken prisoner to Egypt where he died. Jehoiakim, another of Josiah's sons, was seized in the eleventh year of his reign, and after being allowed to witness the death of his own sons, was carried away to Babylon. But there was another son named Jehoiachin, who reigned in the place of his father. He ruled for three months only, and afterwards shared the fate of his father in being borne away to the strange land of Babylon.

It is at this juncture that we see the need for God's intervention, when a proud invader lays hands on one after another of the royal Messianic line, and seems ready to extinguish it altogether. But again we repeat that it was only a crisis when regarded from a human point of view. The covenant had been made with David, and the Babylonian power was a small thing to oppose it. And so we read on, and as we read, think of Jehoiachin (or Jechonias) lying in long captivity; until a strange and wonderful change comes about.

"And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin, king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, that Evil-Merodach, king of Babylon in the year that he began to reign did lift up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison" (2 Kings 25:27).

Thus we see how the **line was preserved through so many years**, although in the midst of adversity, and how at last its representative gained release and favour even among aliens. These reflections should help us to read with increased interest and appreciation the words in Matthew's first chapter:

"And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel, and Salathiel begat Zorobabel" (5:12). A pleasing sequel is provided in the time of the restoration, when the kingly line is prominently represented among the active workers. In Ezra it is recorded that Zorobabel, the son of Shealtiel (*i.e.*, Salathiel) helped in building the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. So also in the prophecy of Zechariah in chapter four.⁹ The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the

foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. (Zec 4:9 KJV)

THE FIVE WOMEN

Five women are named or referred to in this genealogy of Jesus, and each one figures in some definite episode in the nation's history. They are Tamar, Rachab (identified with Rahab), Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary. To those who read the scriptures, the history of these women is too well known to need repeating here. Two of the number were undoubtedly Gentiles, and it is certain that when they came to trust in the God of Israel, they little dreamt that such honour was in store for them as to be written, not only in Israel's royal line, but in the line of the Messiah himself. Boaz had rightly appraised the wise course of Ruth, and said "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel under whose wings thou art come to trust" (Ruth 2:12). She received recompense during her lifetime; when she awakes in the resurrection, what glad surprise awaits her!—to find her name inscribed so wonderfully in "the book of the generation of Jesus Christ." O happy Ruth! And happy Rahab, too, likewise written in that book, and twice set up as an example for believers "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent *them* out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (James 2:25); By faith the harlot Rahab perished not, with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace. (Heb 11:31). There is a double lesson to be learnt by the contemplation of these exemplary Gentile women; first, that lesson which is always taught by the good deeds of others, and secondly the encouragement from the appreciation which God so clearly shows.

THE genealogy with which the gospel of Matthew begins has provided a weapon with which to attack the believer.

There are difficulties in the genealogy itself, but an important criticism is based on its obvious divergence from the genealogy given in Luke's gospel, chapter 3.

The reply to the objection, and the explanation of the apparent discrepancy are well known to constant readers of the Word.

We have in Matthew the genealogy of Joseph, and in Luke the genealogy of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

A few considerations in this connection are interesting, and confirm us in our belief that this is the true explanation.

In the first place, on referring to Matt. 1:1 and those well-known words with which the New Testament opens, we read: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham"; but this is not an accurate rendering of the original Greek.

We learn from the *Emphatic Diaglott* that the definite article "the" is absent, and that the words actually are: "A record of descent of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham." The omission of the article may be a hint of the possibility of there being another "record of descent" (to be found in Luke).

Further, an examination of the two genealogies will show a difference in the words used. The word employed by Matthew to connect the several generations is the word "begat"—thus, Abraham begat Isaac . . ."—but on referring to Luke's gospel we find that this word is not used at all. We read: "Jesus . . . being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli," etc. Now, Matthew tells us (4:16) that "Jacob begat Joseph," and this word "begat" seems to show us that Matthew is giving us Joseph's actual father.

In what sense then was Joseph the son of Heli, if, as Matthew says, his father's name was Jacob? It will be found on examining the A.V. of Luke 3:23, that the words "the son of" are in italics, and thus are not in

the original. It follows, therefore, that Luke 3:23 should read thus: "Jesus . . . being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was of Heli . . ."

It is significant, though, that the words "the son of," as applied to "Jesus being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph" *are* in the original and are not in italics.

The explanation is quite simple. Jesus was thought to be the actual son of Joseph by those ignorant of the truth of the Virgin Birth, but of Joseph it is simply recorded that he "was of Heli." We are therefore justified in suggesting that Joseph was not the actual son of Heli, but his son-in-law by his marriage to Mary, who would thus be Heli's daughter, this position being strengthened by the fact, above referred to, that Luke does not state that he was the son of Heli, but that he was "of Heli."

Why, then, the two genealogies?

In the first place, Matthew shows that Joseph was in the royal line from David, Solomon, Rehoboam, etc., and since Joseph was the husband of Mary—Jesus, her son, would in the eyes of the law be Joseph's son, and thus legally of the royal house, by adoption.

On the other hand, Jesus was definitely not Joseph's son in the actual sense of the term, and yet Messiah was to be an actual descendant of David, according to the flesh.

This was fulfilled, in that Mary also was of the House of David, but not in the royal line. We learn from Luke 3:31 that her descent was traced, not through Solomon, but through Nathan, another son of David.

Thus, the two genealogies, instead of presenting a difficulty, show to us how through his mother, "Jesus Christ our Lord was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3), and was legally of the royal house of David through his adoption by Joseph.

An interesting point arises in connection with the genealogy in Matthew's record. In the course of the genealogy reference is made to

the fact that “Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren about the time they were carried away to Babylon . . .” (Matt. 1:11).

This King Jechonias is King Coniah, referred to in Jeremiah 22:28–30, and we read: “Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol? . . . Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David and ruling any more in Judah.”

It is evident that this does not mean that Coniah was to have no children at all, for in the same verse reference is made to “his seed,” which should not prosper.

The context itself forces upon us the interpretation that “write ye this man childless” means that so far as the throne of Judah was concerned none of his descendants should inherit it.

This is confirmed by the Septuagint version, where the Greek word equivalent to the Hebrew for “childless” is a word signifying “excommunicated,” that is, so far as the kingship was concerned.

The important point is this: If Matthew’s genealogy represents the actual human parentage of our Lord, then this prophecy in Jeremiah would not have been true, for, in that case, Jesus would have been a descendant of Coniah, of whom it was said, as we have seen, “no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David,” and we know that Jesus is to sit upon the throne of David.

But if, as we maintain, the genealogy in Luke represents our Lord’s actual parentage through Mary his mother, the difficulty disappears, for Jesus was not a descendant of Coniah, since his mother was not, she not being of the royal house.

It would be unwise to be over-dogmatic on such matters as genealogies and, indeed, the apostle Paul himself warns us on this subject (Titus 3:9).

Nevertheless, whilst difficulties with these two records still remain, this would seem to be a reasonable explanation.

The most important point is its incidental confirmation of the Virgin Birth of our Lord, since if Joseph had been his actual father, he would

have a descendant of Coniah, and thus debarred from the throne of Judah by God's declaration in Jeremiah 22.

The provision of the other genealogy shows us how beautifully the overruling hand of God provided in choosing Mary, of the seed of David, as his mother.

We will now examine a few points of a different character, confining ourselves to the writings of Luke. Luke is a historian, being the writer of the gospel record which bears his name, and also of the Acts of the Apostles.

As with other Scripture historians, the accuracy of his narrative has been the subject of attack by modern critics. The truth of his reference in Luke 2:2 to the "taxing" under Cyrenius has been questioned, but has since been found to be accurate.

We will not deal with this, but will refer to four incidental references in the Acts of the Apostles, to matters upon which an uninformed and uninspired historian could easily have shown his inaccuracy.

The first is in Acts 15:7, where we are introduced to one Sergius Paulus, "proconsul" of Cyprus. A proconsul was an officer appointed annually by the Roman Senate. But in the days of Augustus, Cyprus had been an imperial province, governed by "propraetors." Was Luke mistaken? He was not, for an ancient historian records that Cyprus had been handed over to the Roman Senate in exchange for another province, thus bringing about the change from "propraetors" to "proconsuls."

Again, in Acts 18:12, Luke calls Gallio "proconsul of Achaia." Achaia had been governed by "proconsuls," but Tiberius had changed its status and made it an imperia province, thus necessitating a change in the form of government to "propraetors." Is Luke mistaken?

It had remained an imperial province until five or six years before the time of which Luke writes, when the emperor Claudius restored Achaia to the Senate, thus bringing about the change to “proconsuls” again.

Thus is the history verified.

But does Luke happen to have been right by chance? Does he call all “governors” “proconsuls”?

He does not, for on turning to Acts 17:6 we find him using a different title for “rulers.” This time it is the word “politarch,” and so far as literature is concerned the title has never been found elsewhere. Was Luke mistaken?

He was not, for the title has been found inscribed on an arch in the very place of which Luke is writing—Thessalonica.

The last reference is to Publius, “the chief man” of the island of Malta (Acts 28:7).

The word translated “chief man” is *protos*, and, as ascertained from inscriptions found in the island, *protos* was probably the official title of the governor of Malta.

Such accuracy is what the believer in the inspiration of the Bible expects, but such points as these are sometimes useful, for with them the critic can be confronted and asked for an explanation.

For if the records are as unreliable as they declare, then what is the explanation of such truly remarkable correctness of detail?

Furthermore, in two of the above instances, the record is connected with a miracle. In the case of Acts 13:7, we have the miraculous blinding of Elymas, the sorcerer, and in the case of Acts 28:7 we have the miraculous preservation of Paul from the fatal effects of a viper’s bite. Accuracy in the historical detail points to the writer having been a man “on the spot.” Then surely it does also with regard to the miraculous occurrences.

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