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HOW IS JESUS A BIOLOGICAL DESCENDANT OF DAVID WHEN HE DID NOT HAVE A BIOLOGICAL HUMAN FATHER

Introduction to the Birth of Jesus Christ in the New Testament

It is the purpose of this article to demonstrate the biological sonship of Jesus, in the flesh, to David. The question of the birth of Christ, therefore, will need to be discussed first, so that certain basic questions, that must necessarily be asked, can be answered beforehand. It involves the Bethlehem that Jesus was born into, along with His virgin birth as it was foretold by the Prophets Isaiah and Micah. An establishment of the date of Christ’s birth along with the incarnation are outside the scope of this article. This, however, is covered in my book entitled “*Here Come the Romans.*”

First of all, how Jesus was conceived is important in how one establishes a Davidic pedigree in Jesus, so the birth of Jesus must also be dealt with. Establishing the birth of Christ, in this manner allows me to clear away some legitimate objections that some scholars make to this article. That will leave this subsequent discussion to stand or fall on purely historical, textual and theological considerations as it rightly should, and not on the basis of some other assumptions a person may want to make independent of what Scripture in fact says.

When reading about the birth of Christ, readers always read from the New Testament because it provides the clearest detail about Jesus’s biological descendancy in the Bible. The Old Testament prophets hinted upon the revelation of Christ but it was not realized until its prophetic fulfillment as recorded in the Gospels. The Gospel of Luke provides a longer birth narrative of Christ than any other book in the Bible. He uses nearly three chapters dealing with this subject alone.

In Luke chapter one, following his prologue, the narrative begins with Zachariah and the angel Gabriel (1:5–13). The births of John the Baptist (1:8–25) and Jesus are announced (1:26–38), and in 1:24–26, the narrative shifts from Zachariah to Mary and Elizabeth where it explains how they

deal with these miracles, the burden of God placed upon them, as granted to them by the Lord. Chapter two presents the situation in life of early Bethlehem at the turn of the century. It presents the Bethlehemic life of nomad shepherds tending their flocks in the fields of Bethlehem, the miraculous appearance of angels, the visitation of wise men from the east, the infant Jesus at the temple, and the socio-cultural conflict surrounding all the events that followed.

In chapter three following the introduction to the ministry of John the Baptist, verse twenty-three adds the genealogy table of Jesus all the way through the end of the chapter. The genealogy table then is a huge component to understanding the birth narrative. Both Luke and Matthew thought the information was important enough to provide it to their readers. As such, it connects Christ with ancient OT prophecies to their fulfillment in the NT. Luke depends on the OT for an authoritative record of Jesus, proclaimed as the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures.

But in order for God's plan for the redemption of the human race could work, His redeemer had to be a sinless human being. The female God chose to bring Jesus into the world had to be a virgin. Luke uses Intertextuality as he reads the sinless Jesus and Virgin Mary as the fulfillment to Isaiah's prophecy. In his: "καθ ὡς παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν οἱ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς" (just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning), had to include interviews with people that knew Jesus personally. It also included OT Messianic writings that spoke of a coming Messiah or Anointed One of God.

Understanding The Bethlehem of Jesus Before His Birth

In this section it is important for me to link the situation in of later Bethlehem in the century before Jesus was born. Luke's usage of "the son of," language within his genealogy table is only used in connection between Joseph and Jesus, "υἱος ἰωσηφ του." Following Joseph, "ο υἱος" (the son) is no longer used to describe the other people throughout it, but only "του" (of). Joseph whom Christ "as was 'supposed' the son of Joseph" – means that he was only the son of Joseph in a parental relationship but not of a biological relationship. Apart from Joseph and Jesus, only "του" (of) is used to express the biological relationship of all the other people in the table.

The narratives of Luke's first three chapters is not a collection of disjointed blocks of information, as some scholars might suggest. The information is

all tied together under one complete narrative. The Apostle Paul made use of this information in his epistles, where in one of them he wrote: “Concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh” (Rom 1:3). And in another one he wrote, “When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4-5, NASB).

The English word fullness is translated in the NT from πλήρωμα (pleroma) implies: fullness, completion, or full number. In the context of 4:4 (τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου) it means the fully complete appointed time, implying the fulfillment of totality of a time period. It marked the time in human history that God determined the Law was at its final completion. It was when Jesus was born in Bethlehem as it was foretold by the Prophet Micah (5:2). Early life in Bethlehem before the dawn of the Messiah was preceded by the Intertestamental years, following the restored kingdom of Israel and Judah’s history. The setting is in the days of Heli/Eli, the son of *Matthat* (Luke 3:23-24).

In the book of Micah (5:2) the town Bethlehem (house of bread) called Bethlehem-Ephrathah is Bethlehem-Judah. Micah's phrase from the KJV "Though you are the smallest among the thousands of Judah..." emphasizes that Bethlehem was one of the smallest towns in the nation of Judah. This is brought out further by the NET. "Bethlehem-Ephrathah, you are one of the smallest towns in Judah..." Satchel believes that at the time of the birth of Christ, the descendants of David living in Bethlehem were in a state of poverty. [1]

Bethlehem was also called Ephrathah meaning fruitful, nicknamed by the prophet because of its covenantal and messianic significance. Though a small and insignificant town in Judah, yet it was fruitful in what it produced for God’s redemptive purposes; the house of David and location of the birth of Christ. One of its thriving natural resources, overlooked however, was its fresh flowing water, a required dependency for life. The Bethlehem-Judah before Jesus was born had its life setting in the time Joseph and Mary, along Joseph’s father Jacob (son of Matthan), and Mary’s father Heli (son of Matthat).

The small town had an overflow of people because of overcrowding of three yearly pilgrimage festivals in Jerusalem just six-miles to its north. The fact

is evidenced from Luke's Gospel (2:7), how "there was no more room in the inn" when Mary was about to give birth. It was a small town that became urban and significant only during the time for celebration of three yearly festivals. It also had non-urban areas consisting of farming and the rearing of animals. Luke (2:8) provides evidence that shepherds were "...abiding in the field keeping watch over their flock by night." [2]

While situated approximately six miles south of Jerusalem, pilgrims flooded into Jerusalem rendering the town being unable to cope with the thousands of thousands making a required pilgrimage to celebrate: Passover (Feast of Unleavened Bread), Ingathering (Feast of Booths, Tabernacles), and Harvest (Feast of Pentecost) (Ex. 23:14–19). Collectively, the festivals structured Israel's liturgical year and reinforced a rhythm of shaping their identity and worship long before and prior to the New Testament era.

Understanding the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ

The virgin birth is essential to the Christen faith which hinges on the premise of Scripture that Jesus was a sinless human being, born from a natural physical birth to die for the sins of the world, to save all people from their sins. If Jesus would have had a biological human father he would have been sinful as every other human being that ever lived. The sin nature of Adam would have been passed through Joseph to Christ. Jesus, however, was able to escape the sin nature in birth (Ps. 51:5), resident in every human by his supernatural conception of the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:35).

He was not conceived in sin, and yet he was a real, genuine and authentic human being in every way like we are, except he did not have the sin nature passed down from Adam to every person. The virgin birth of Christ is a necessary component to the foundation of salvation and the Christian faith because of the fact that humanities savior had no sin (was sinless). Psalm 51:5 does not conflict with, undermine, or explain Christ's virgin birth; rather, it highlights why it is divinely and theologically necessary.

David's lament described the universal condition of fallen humanity, whereas the virgin birth revealed the divine interruption of that condition. Where David confessed, "I was conceived in sin," the angel declared of Christ, "The holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

Howbeit, Psalm 51:5 does not challenge the virgin birth, but rather necessitates it. For without it, Christ would stand under the same inherited condition that David lamented. With it, Christ becomes the last Adam, entering humanity without Adam's corruption and able to redeem all who were born into it (Rom 5:18–19).

The denial of Christ's virgin birth in America as traced by Mohler also has identification with emergence of Protestant liberalism in the early 20th century. A reformed theologian, Fritz Barth, denies the corporeality of it. From the perspective of Karl Barth, he says yes to Jesus's virgin birth which he states "is not a nuisance for Him but a true statement." Fritz however, holds to a natural theology, rejecting the virgin birth which cost him his position as a professor. Harry Fosdick went even further by rejecting the inerrancy of Scripture, a literal return of Christ, and the virgin birth. [3]

Some others that followed on the steps of Fosdick are: Rudolph Bultmann, John Spong, John Hick, Gerd Ludemann, Robert Funk, John Corssan, and the Jesus Seminar of whom all deny the foundation Biblical teaching of the virgin birth of Christ. Such denials lead to nothing good, because it is not for God's benefit, but ours. It safeguards the truth that Jesus did not inherit Adam's fallen nature because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18–25; Luke 1:35), and entered the human race fully human yet without sin (Heb 4:15). To deny the virgin birth is an attempt to unravel the biblical logic of salvation itself that affects the doctrines of sin, incarnation, atonement, and Scriptural authority.

As it was spoken by Isaiah the prophet in 7:14, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." Isaiah's prophecy was intertextually ratified by the Gospel writers Luke (1:26–35) and Matthew (1:22–23). In Isaiah's prophecy the term **עַלְמָה** (*ha-alma*) in the context of Isaiah 7:14 does not mean young woman, as some would want to assume. Again, both Luke and Matthew authoritatively ratified it, virgin (a person who has never had sex). In Luke 1:34 Mary stated, "...I am a virgin." The angel Gabriel also confirmed as such (see Luke 1:35 and Matt 1:23).

Vermes highlights that the Greek version of Genesis translates from three Hebrew words for virgin: *bethulah* (virgin), *Na'arah* (girl), and *almah* (young woman). [4] While the NASB's version of Isaiah (7:14) uses the English term maiden, the context will always provide the correct meaning

of the word. It is what Luke and Matthew intended. That is, they rendered παρθένος and παρθένον as a young virgin woman or maiden that becomes pregnant without copulation. It renders the birth of Christ a miracle.

The Hebrew term אַלְמָנָה (*alma*) is not translated “young woman” in the Luke (1:27, 33) and Matthew (1:23). Those who argue for young woman instead of virgin take this assumption from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), and not from the Hebrew text. The NRSV says: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” It is about the only English translation that renders the verse this way. This is a poor translation because it potentially changes the meaning of the text. A virgin is not necessarily a young woman and a young woman is not necessarily a virgin.

Finally, the Hebrew word used in Isaiah 7:14 is not “young woman,” the word is “virgin.” And it is explicitly applied in the NT. Both Hebrew usage, Second Temple Jewish interpretation, and apostolic interpretation and application converge on the same conclusion that Isaiah 7:14 speaks of a virgin, not merely a young woman. Any attempt to deny the virginal meaning is driven less by linguistic evidence and more by theological presuppositions about the supernatural, rather than by the text itself.

The Genealogy Tables of Luke and Matthew that Records the Humanity of Christ

The revelation of Jesus Christ, in Luke’s birth narrative, is the glue that holds together the Third Gospel and the history of the Christian Church. Luke’s birthed, crucified, and resurrected *kurios* entered the physical world as a real, genuine, and authentic Lord and Savior on the specific mission of reconciling all things unto Himself (Col 1:20a), and ascended to heaven. [5] It was for Christ to be born, to die for all sins, and bring humanity back into a right relationship with God. Even as the first Adam led the human race away from God, the last Adam led it back to Him (1 Cor 15:21–22).

Neither Mark nor John provides a birth narrative for Jesus unlike Luke and Matthew. The reason for exploring genealogy is to highlight key items that contribute to the driving of his narrative for relying on the OT as one of his primary sources of information. It is odd to us and perhaps to Jews (consider the Gospel of Matthew for instance) how Luke doesn’t begin his

book with the genealogy table. It is not until chapter-three, after Christ's public baptism, until he provides the genealogy table. [6]

It would seem natural for a Jew like Matthew to provide the genealogy table at the beginning of his Gospel. While he directs his Gospel to a majority Jewish audience, he only connects Jesus's backward to their ancestor, Abraham. Unlike Luke who does the opposite, and directs his Gospel to non-Jews, it is odd, or would also seem natural for him to begin his narrative at the beginning of the book. Instead, he provides this information after Christ's baptism.

Luke used OT genealogy tables to make connections to Jesus's lineage, tracing backward to Adam. Joseph's parents (Jesus's grandparents according to the flesh) were important to Luke's narrative in connection to Davidic descendants already living in Bethlehem as the genealogy table asserts. It was no need for Luke to reinvent the wheel. He simply used the information already available to him in the OT as one of his sources (see Luke 1:2). Both infancy narratives of Luke and Matthew link Jesus's birth back to Israel's previous history, connecting his birth to the previous Jewish ancestor in the tribe of Judah as their genealogical table's state.

The Matthean account is more didactic and apologetic. He assures his readers of God's plan as proclaimed by the prophets Isaiah and Micah that Jesus is indeed the Christ conceived of a virgin (Isa 7:14), born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2), and a Nazarene (not by vow but locality) from Nazareth (Matt 2:23). The Lucan account in contrast is less apologetic in delivery. He is more interested in establishing the continuity of the Messianic-movement with Israel. Luke desired for Gentile believers to know that they were also included in God's family; and that the earthly ministry of Jesus encapsulated non-Jews into God's plan. For this reason, he extends Jesus's genealogy back to Adam the son of God. He wanted to trace the genealogy back to Adam in order to demonstrate that Jesus belonged to all of mankind and not only to the Jewish race. [7]

The genealogical tables for the Gospel's of Luke and Matthew deal with the history of Jesus Christ based of connections in OT history. Most Bible readers, when reading Luke and Matthew often pass over the genealogical table as what they feel as nonessential information. It is important to understand how Jesus is connected back to David, Abraham, and Adam as the promised "seed of the woman," proving that he was the promised

Messiah in Genesis 3:15. As stated, both Gospel writers thought the data was important enough for them to exposit to their readers.

Luke's Table (3:23–24)

²³ And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli (KJV).

Matthew's Table (1:15–16)

¹⁵ And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; ¹⁶ And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ (KJV).

From the onset, curious and attentive readers will notice that the genealogy tables of Luke and Matthew are different which would seem like an apparent contradiction of historical information. Both authors intended to trace Jesus's genealogy between Joseph and King David, which information differs between both writers, but is exactly the same between David and Abraham. While Joseph was not Jesus's biological father, Luke says of Joseph "as was supposed" being the father of Jesus because of his marriage to Jesus's biological mother, Mary.

Jesus did not have a heavenly flesh and blood. If so, He would not be human in every way as we are (yet without sin). The language used to trace the Jesus's genealogy back to David, it is in so far as Jesus received his humanity from his mother Mary (who according to Edwards was also a biological descendant of David), and not from his non-biological father, Joseph. ^[8] His conception by the Holy Spirit was a supernatural interposition which the Virgin Mary gave birth to the Christ, thus bringing God into the world as a human being.

Joseph was the father of Jesus by adoption not biologically, whereas the male lineage was used at this time in history when much importance of women was ostracized in those ancient societies. According to Guzik, genealogies were commonly traced through the lineage of the father rather than the mother's lineage in ancient time.^[9] It essentially was a unique situation where his mother, Mary was a virgin giving birth, whereas Jesus was supernaturally conceived and born from a virgin girl.

The table provided by Matthew was shortened for specific purposes of the author, and some names were omitted. While intended primarily to the Jewish nation, it was natural for him to begin with Abraham in descending structure with the word “begat;” which in whom signified the identity and beginning of their nation. He lists forty-two generations in three groups each that covered approximately two-thousand years. His first grouping covers a thousand years, the second group, four-hundred years, and the third group covers six-hundred years. Within his third grouping, he names only thirteen generations, in which the fourteenth was evidently intended for Mary.

Luke’s table differs from Matthew’s in that he begins with Joseph and goes backward in time to Adam, using the phrase “was son of,” instead of stopping at Abraham. The apparent reason Luke differs from Matthew if going forward toward Joseph is because Luke followed Mary’s line which was Jesus’s physical biological lineage. In doing so, the language he states “...He [Jesus] was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli. So, to explain this more clearly, Heli was Mary’s biological father, and Joseph’s father in-law.

Matthew, in being a real Jew as he was, followed that of Jesus’s legal lineage of adoption, that is, Joseph’s biological lineage. This is only the case in places where the tables differ between Joseph and David. Luke began with Joseph in his way of following ancient proper customary patterns by not including women in his table. Luke writing to non-Jews, found it natural to trace this, not with the Jewish nation, but to the origin of the human race. [10]

Luke displays separate lines, inking OT lines of two people Shealtiel and Zerubbabel. Shealtiel gets linked to Jeconiah, and Shealtiel is also linked to Zerubbabel following the Babylonian captivity. It is more commonly accepted that Matthew gave Joseph’s line showing Jesus to be the legal heir to the promises given in Abraham and David. And for Luke he gives Mary’s line showing Jesus as the blood–descendant of David. Mary’s genealogy in accordance to Jewish usage was identified in her husband’s name. In this instance Joseph was the son in law of *Heli* through Mary (Luke 3:23), and Jacob was Joseph’s biological father (Matt 1:16).

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