

Luke 3:23-38: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 3 verses 23 to 38. The son of Job.

the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salah, the son of Nashon, the son of Aminadab, the son of Admen, the son of Ani, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Sirah, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eba, the son of Shelah, the son of Chaanin, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Chaanin, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God. Luke chapter 3, after the baptism of Jesus, ends with a genealogy and it describes Jesus entering into his ministry at the age of 30 years old. This is the same age that the priests would have begun their ministry. It's the same age as Joseph begins to serve Pharaoh, that David becomes king and Ezekiel in the 30th year sees the heavens opened and sees visions of God. So in all of these cases we're seeing an entrance into some sort of ministry, whether it's prophetic ministry in the case of Ezekiel, whether it's kingly ministry in the case of David, whether it's the ministry of stewardship in the case of Joseph or the ministry of the priests in the temple. There's a different setting of the genealogy here than we find in Matthew. In Matthew it comes at the very beginning of the book in chapter 1 and it's set out in 42 generations divided into three sets of 14 and particularly emphasising David and Abraham. This doesn't introduce the gospel but rather it occurs after the baptism and before the temptation. However it does frame this as a sort of beginning of sorts. It's the beginning of Jesus' ministry and it lies between two key events. The father's statement of Jesus' sonship leads into this. Now this genealogy is also interesting in other ways.

It moves backwards rather than forwards. Most of the genealogies that we have in scripture start off with the oldest figure and then move forward to more recent times. This starts off with Christ and then moves backwards and it goes back to the very very beginning to Abraham as the son of God.

There's a cosmic scope that opens up here. Genealogies serve a number of different purposes. One of the things that they do is to gather large periods of time together and large stories are condensed within a genealogy. We have a sense of the different figures who are involved and the legacy that a person might be bearing in what they're doing. Typically the further you go back in a genealogy the more it becomes a matter of diminishing returns. If we go back far enough just about anyone can be seen as a descendant from some great ancestor because their genealogy has spread so wide and has been so mixed in with other peoples. Which of us is not descended from Adam or from Noah? While this is the case however, Jesus in the beginning of his ministry is related to these figures in a different way.

He holds their destiny within himself. Jesus takes the destiny of the whole human race and he's going to live it out and bring it to its head. So it's not just that he has the blood of Adam in him. All of us are descended from Adam. No, it's the fact that Jesus will achieve for the human race what Adam once lost and failed to achieve. When we look at this genealogy and compare it with Matthew there are a number of problems though. It seems as if very few names are shared in common, certainly once we get past David.

[4 : 48] Even the numbers of names are very different. Matthew structures his genealogy according to 314s whereas Luke is a genealogy of 77. Some have suggested that Matthew's is the genealogy of Joseph whereas the genealogy in Luke is that of Mary. But in both cases it's Joseph that is connected with the genealogy of David in particular and there's no reason to believe that Mary was descended from David.

For the numbers of the names we should not worry that much about that. The genealogies are not necessarily comprehensive. They don't necessarily include every single figure. Luke's could be a lot more extensive than Matthew's in this regard. Other suggestions include the possibility that one is a sort of royal line and the other is a father-son line of genealogy. If for instance you were to trace the kings of the United Kingdom and go all the way back and trace the genealogy you would get a different list from the list of those who sat on the throne in order. And Matthew seems to follow this line of royal succession whereas Luke departs from it quite radically. So maybe that's part of what's going on. Both Matthew and Luke seem to have some structuring device for their genealogy. Matthew's is very apparent. It has the three sets of 14 and it's divided according to key events and key characters Abraham, David, the descent into Babylon. And Luke's does not have quite so clear a pattern. But yet it is 77 names and these can be broken into 11 lists of seven names. And there are key names at specific points. David starts the seventh list of seven names. Abraham starts the ninth. Enoch the eleventh.

Perhaps with the focus upon the number seven we're supposed to hear jubilee themes. Seven, seven times seven, 70 or 70 times seven, or maybe in this case 77 are all numbers that have that sort of resonance.

And perhaps that's part of what Luke is trying to do here to frame what Jesus is doing as a jubilee type event. It's also interesting that it goes back. While this is a feature found in common with other genealogies at the time, most of the genealogies of scripture move forward from father to son all the way down rather than from son to father. That movement from son to father is most common when we see someone's pedigree set out. That they are someone who has title to a particular office or role. Perhaps seeing as this comes at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, we're supposed to see it in this light. However, although it is important for Luke and elsewhere in the gospels that Jesus is traced through David, that he belongs to the Davidic line, he comes through Nathan, which is surprising. In Matthew it's Solomon. In seeking clues to try and understand the reason for this, some have observed Zechariah chapter 12 and seen there the possibility of Nathan's line being set apart from the rest of the house of David. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only son, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-Rimon in the plains of Megiddo. The land shall mourn each family by itself, the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves, the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves, the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves, the family of the Shimeites by itself, and their wives by themselves, and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves.

Perhaps there is a particular significance to the line of Nathan, but if there is, I don't have an idea what it could be. A further interesting detail is the absence of the name of Jeconiah or Jehoiachin from Luke as the father of Shealtiel whereas he is present in the gospel of Matthew. Luke mentions a different father for Shealtiel. Now this might be in part related to Jeremiah chapter 22 verse 30 where there's a curse upon Jeconiah. Thus says the Lord, write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah. Yet we do hear that in 1st Chronicles chapter 3 verses 16 to 17 he did have a son. The descendants of Jehoiachin, Jeconiah his son, Zedekiah his son, and the sons of Jeconiah the captive Shealtiel his son. Now Shealtiel may have been adopted and the differences between the two genealogies may be explained this way.

[9 : 31] One way or another these genealogies are complex and we have to resort to some difficult explanation to reconcile them. Have to think in terms of levirate marriage or in terms of adoption or in terms of a royal line and a natural biological line or in terms of Mary's line and Joseph's line.

There are many different options of various merits. Jesus' genealogy and ancestry are complex, containing many stories that have not been told to us. This of course is true of most people's genealogies. The important thing is that the Son of God has taken his stand in history. He has come in the middle of history. He's the one who takes the human race and its story upon himself and he stands as part of a line of promise, running from Abraham through the patriarchs to David and down through the history of Israel and being fulfilled at that moment in history. The Christmas Carol talks about the hopes and fears of all the years being met in Bethlehem that night and one of the things that the genealogy of Luke is doing is showing us that the hopes and fears of all the years are met in the figure of Jesus Christ. That at this juncture in history this weight is coming upon his shoulders just as he's about to go out and start his ministry. He is the one who's bearing the weight of the world. The entire fate of humanity has come down to him. He is parallel in this respect to Adam. This will help us to see in the account of the temptation of Christ a contrast with the temptation of Adam which he failed in the garden. Jesus succeeds in the wilderness. The genealogy ends with the words the Son of God. Adam was the one who had God as his father. In a particular way God formed him out of the dust of the earth. But Christ in the events immediately preceding this has been declared to be the Son of God by the Father's voice speaking from heaven. You are my beloved Son. And in what follows Jesus is being tested concerning his Sonship by Satan in the wilderness. So the theme of divine

Sonship is another crucial part of Luke's genealogy and why he has it in this way and in this place. A question to consider. Thinking about the genealogies of the Old and New Testament, can you think of some of the various purposes that they are performing in their different locations?