Two Family Trees — and One King

Leader copy · Men's Jail Ministry · a 15-minute lesson · Pleasant Springs Church

One of the big arguments people use to say the Bible isn't true — and here is the solution.
· **The full study online:** https://ps-church.com/deep-research/two-genealogies-of-jesus

Before you start — notes for the teacher *(not read aloud)*

Timing. About **15 minutes** at a slow, steady pace. The bracketed times are cumulative. If you are short on time, the **designated cut is the second half of "The daughters' law"** — the Ezra 2:61 paragraph, marked in the script. It saves about a minute. If you are *very* short, cut that whole section down to one sentence: *"God's law had a rule for a family with only daughters — the land and the name passed through the daughter to her husband."* **Never cut "The key: the virgin birth," the honest box, or the prayer.** They are the point of the lesson.

The one sentence the whole lesson proves. *Jesus is King by law through Joseph and King by blood through Mary — and the virgin birth makes both true.* If you lose your place, say that sentence and move to the next heading.

Who is in the room. Men. Some are sharp and like an argument — let them have one; this lesson is built as a problem and a solution. Some have heard "the Bible contradicts itself" and quit reading. Some never had a father who stepped up. Some are fathers. Some are not. **Do not assume any of it.**

Hand out the disciple copy first. The family-tree drawing on it does half the teaching. When you reach "The key," hold up a copy and trace both lines with your finger.

What not to say. - **Never mention anyone's charges, case, or court date** — not even as a light example. - **Do not ask who has children,** and do not bring up custody, child support, or visits. The Joseph section speaks to fathers, sons, and men with no children at all. Keep it that wide. - **Do not run down a man's own father,** and do not tell a man his father "did his best." You don't know. Say what Joseph did and let God do the rest. - **Do not claim more than we know.** Say Luke's list is *most likely* Mary's line. Do not say "the Bible says Mary's father was Heli." It does not say that in so many words. - **Do not mock skeptics.** The two-list problem is a fair question. Christians have asked it since the early church. Treat the man who raises it with respect. - **No Greek or Hebrew on the board or in your mouth.** Do the language work behind the scenes and say the finding in plain English.

Words to define the first time you use them (the script does this): *genealogy* — a family tree written as a list of names; *curse* — God's sentence of judgment on someone; *adopt* — to take a child as your own, with your name and your rights; *heir* — the one who gets what a father leaves behind.

Spellings. The ESV spells the king **Jechoniah** in Matthew. Jeremiah calls the same man **Coniah** (Jeremiah 22:24). Other Bibles say Jeconiah or Jehoiachin. Same king. Tell the men so if anyone asks.

If someone pushes back — things worth knowing (do not teach these unless asked): - **"Childless"?** Jeremiah 22:30 says "write this man down as childless," but he did have sons (1 Chronicles 3:17 names Shealtiel). The rest of the verse explains it: none of them would *sit on David's throne*. He was childless as far as the crown goes. - **The oldest answer is different.** An early church writer, **Julius Africanus** (about AD 220), said both lists are Joseph's. In his view, Jacob and Heli were half-brothers. One died without a son. By the old custom, the other married the widow, so that the first child would carry the dead man's name (Deuteronomy 25:5–6). So Joseph was Jacob's son by blood and Heli's son by law. That answer works too — which is the point: **there is more than one good answer.** - **Shealtiel and Zerubbabel show up in both lists** (Matthew 1:12; Luke 3:27). Some think they are the same two men; some think they are different men with the same names. It is debated. - **Was Mary from David's family?** The angel told Mary, before she married, that God would give her son "the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32). Many read that as a sign that Mary was of David's line. On the other hand, her relative Elizabeth came from the priests' family (Luke 1:5, 36). So families mixed, and that verse alone does not settle it. - **Did God lift the curse?** Haggai 2:23 calls Zerubbabel — Jechoniah's grandson — God's "signet ring," the very picture Jeremiah used when God tore Coniah off (Jeremiah 22:24). Some read that as God softening the curse. But Zerubbabel was a governor, never a king. Either way, the virgin birth answer still stands. - **Matthew skips some generations.** In a Bible family tree, "the father of" can mean "the ancestor of." That was normal and is not an error.

Scripture. English, ESV — every quotation checked against Crossway's own text. The language work behind the lesson is real, but it stays off this page and is said in plain English.

THE SCRIPT

[0:00] Open — one of the big arguments

Some of you have heard this one. Maybe a man in here said it to you. Maybe you said it.

"The Bible can't be true. It contradicts itself. Look — Matthew and Luke both give Jesus a family tree. And they're different. They don't even agree on who his grandfather was."

That is one of the big arguments people use to say the Bible — or the whole story of Jesus — isn't true. And it's a fair question. So tonight we're not going to dodge it. **We're going to look the problem in the eye. Then I'll show you the solution.**

Here's the end, so you know where we're going: **Jesus is King by law through Joseph, and King by blood through Mary — and the virgin birth makes both true.** Let's earn that sentence.

[1:30] The problem, part 1 — two trees, two grandfathers

First, a word. A **genealogy** is a family tree written as a list of names. Matthew starts his book with one:

> **Matthew 1:1** — "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

At the bottom of Matthew's list, it says this:

> **Matthew 1:16** — "and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ."

So Joseph's father is **Jacob.** Now turn to Luke. Luke's list runs the other way, from Jesus back:

> **Luke 3:23** — "Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli,"

Joseph, son of **Heli.** Jacob in one book. Heli in the other. And it's not just one name. Go up the two lists and they split at King David. **Matthew goes through David's son Solomon. Luke goes through David's son Nathan.** Two different roads.

So the skeptic says, *"Gotcha."* Hold that thought.

[3:00] The problem, part 2 — a curse on the king's line

It gets worse before it gets better. Matthew's list runs through the kings of Judah. One of those kings was a man named **Jechoniah.** He was so wicked that God put a **curse** on him — and a curse is God's sentence of judgment. Listen to it:

> **Jeremiah 22:30** — "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.'"

None of his offspring. No son of his blood would ever sit on David's throne. That is a life sentence on a family line.

And where is Jechoniah? Right there in Joseph's line:

> **Matthew 1:12** — "Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,"

So now we've got two problems. **One: the lists don't match. Two: if Jesus is Joseph's son, he's under Jechoniah's curse — and he can never be king.** That's the argument at full strength. Now here's the answer.

[4:30] The solution, part 1 — Matthew follows Joseph: the LEGAL line

Matthew follows **Joseph.** And Matthew's list is the line of the kings — David, Solomon, and on down. It's the royal line. Think of it as **the king's paperwork.** Every man in here knows paperwork matters. Whose name is on it decides who has the right.

But Matthew is very careful. Look at verse 16 again. He does *not* say "Joseph the father of Jesus." He says Joseph was *"the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born."* Matthew already knows something. Jesus is not Joseph's son by blood.

Here's what happened. Mary was pregnant, and Joseph knew the baby was not his. Matthew says he planned to end it quietly (Matthew 1:19). He had every reason to walk away. Then God spoke to him:

> **Matthew 1:20–21** — "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

And Joseph did it:

> **Matthew 1:25** — "And he called his name Jesus."

In that world, **the father named the son.** When Joseph named that boy, he was saying, *"He's mine."* That's **adoption** — taking a child as your own, with your name and your rights. From that day Jesus was Joseph's legal son. And that made him Joseph's **heir** — the one who gets what the father leaves. What did Joseph have to leave? Not money. **A legal claim to the throne of David.**

[Slow down.] Men, look at Joseph. Nobody would have blamed him for leaving. He stepped up anyway. He put his own name on a child and gave that child a place to stand. Some of you had a man do that for you. Some of you never did. Either way — **that is what a real man looks like in the Bible.** Quiet. Obedient. He doesn't say one word in the whole story. He just does the right thing.

[7:30] The solution, part 2 — Luke follows Mary: the BLOOD line

Now Luke. Look again at Luke 3:23: *"the son (as was supposed) of Joseph."* **As was supposed.** People *thought* Jesus was Joseph's son. Luke is waving a flag: *this is not an ordinary father-son list.*

Most likely, Luke is giving us **Mary's** family — her blood line. It runs back through a different son of David:

> **Luke 3:31** — "the son of Nathan, the son of David,"

Nathan, not Solomon. Nathan was never king. His line was never under Jechoniah's curse. And Paul says Jesus really is David's blood:

> **Romans 1:3** — "concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh"

According to the flesh. That means by blood. Through his mother.

[9:00] The key — the virgin birth

[Hold up the disciple copy and trace the drawing.] Here's the whole thing on one page. **Left side, dashed line — Joseph's line, the legal line.** It runs through Solomon and the kings, and the curse sits on it at Jechoniah. **Right side, solid line — Mary's line, the blood line,** through Nathan.

Now watch what the virgin birth does.

Jesus is not Joseph's blood. So Jechoniah's curse — *none of his offspring* — **can't touch him.** But Joseph adopted him and named him, so **Jesus gets Joseph's legal right to the throne.**

And **Jesus is Mary's blood** — David's own flesh, through Nathan, with no curse on it.

So Jesus is David's son **both ways.** By law and by blood. If Jesus had been Joseph's natural son, he could never be king. The virgin birth isn't a strange extra in the story. **It's the key that unlocks the whole thing.** God solved a problem six hundred years before anybody noticed it was there.

[10:30] The daughters' law — why Luke calls Joseph "son of Heli"

You might ask: if Luke's list is Mary's, why does it say Joseph is "the son of Heli"?

Here's the answer from God's own law. In Moses' day, a man named Zelophehad died with **no sons — only daughters.** His daughters came to Moses and asked, why should our father's name die out? And God gave a rule:

> **Numbers 27:8** — "If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter."

But there was one condition:

> **Numbers 36:6** — "only they shall marry within the clan of the tribe of their father."

Here is the common answer. Say Heli was Mary's father, and he had no sons. Then Mary carried her father's family line. Joseph was **also** from David's family (Luke 1:27). He married inside the family — just like the law said. And then **the husband was counted as a son in his wife's father's family.** Joseph became "son of Heli." Son-in-law, by our way of talking.

[CUT HERE if short on time — skip to "Be honest."]

Is there any proof that a man could be counted under his wife's father's name? Yes. Here's a priest from the days after the exile:

> **Ezra 2:61** — "the sons of Barzillai (who had taken a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name)."

Called by their name. He married into the family and took his father-in-law's name. That's the same thing Luke does with Joseph.

[12:00] Be honest — what we know, and what Christians still debate

Now I'm going to be straight with you, because you deserve that. *[Point to the box on the handout.]*

What we know for sure: There are two lists. Matthew's is Joseph's. The curse on Jechoniah is real. And Jesus was born of a virgin.

What Christians still debate: whether Luke's list is really Mary's. Whether Mary had no brothers. And whether God later softened the curse — there's a verse in Haggai where God calls Jechoniah's grandson his "signet ring" (Haggai 2:23).

So hear this. **Even if one answer is debated, there are good answers.** Christians in the early church had a different one that works too. And here's the big point: **a contradiction has to be impossible — not just puzzling.** Two lists that *can* both be true are not a contradiction. They are a puzzle. And this puzzle has a solution.

[13:30] What it means for you

Joseph gave Jesus his name and his place in the family. And here is the turn: **God did the same for you.** Paul says:

> **Galatians 4:4–5** — "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

Adoption as sons. Whatever your father did or didn't do — whatever your name has meant up to now — God puts his name on you and calls you his. **That's paperwork nobody can tear up.**

[14:30] Closing prayer

Father, thank you that your Word holds up when we press on it. Thank you for keeping your promise to David for a thousand years, and for solving a problem long before we ever saw it.

Thank you for Joseph — a man who stepped up, who gave a child his name and a place to stand. Make us men like that. Where we have walked away, forgive us. Where nobody stepped up for us, be our Father.

Thank you that Jesus is King by law and King by blood. Thank you that you have adopted us as sons, and put your name on us. Help us to trust your Word, and to follow your Son.

In the name of Jesus, **Amen.**

If you only remember three things

1. **Two lists, two jobs.** Matthew gives Joseph's line — the legal, royal line through Solomon. Luke most likely gives Mary's line — the blood line through Nathan.
2. **The virgin birth is the key.** Jesus is not Joseph's blood, so Jechoniah's curse can't reach him — but as Joseph's adopted, named son he gets Joseph's legal right to David's throne.
3. **A contradiction must be impossible, not just puzzling.** Where an answer is debated, there is still more than one good answer.

The two family trees at a glance

	Matthew 1	Luke 3
Whose line	Joseph's	Most likely Mary's
What kind	Legal — the king's paperwork	Blood — "according to the flesh"
David's son	Solomon (the kings)	Nathan (never king)
The curse	Runs through Jechoniah (Jeremiah 22:30)	No Jechoniah — no curse
Last names	Jacob → Joseph	Heli → (Mary) → "Joseph, son of Heli"
How Jesus gets it	Joseph adopts and names him (Matthew 1:25)	Born of Mary (Romans 1:3)

Discussion starters — if you have time after

1. Before tonight, had you heard that the Bible "contradicts itself"? What did you think of it?
2. Why does it matter that Matthew calls Joseph "the husband of Mary" and not "the father of Jesus"?
3. Joseph never says a word in the Bible. What does his story tell you about what a real man is?

4. What is the difference between a puzzle and a contradiction?
5. What changes for you if God has adopted you and put his name on you?

The full study online — https://ps-church.com/deep-research/two-genealogies-of-jesus

The whole study — both family trees name by name, the curse, the daughters' law, and the answers Christians have given since the early church — is on the Deep Research shelf. More lessons for the jail ministry are at **ps-church.com/discipleship**.

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