Question: There are two contradictory genealogies given for Christ, tracing his ancestry back through Joseph. Matthew says Joseph's father was Jacob, but Luke says his father was Heli. Since both can't be true, at least one is wrong, but we couldn't know which. Probably both are wrong. Nor can I see how Christians could defend either genealogy, since they both say Joseph was Jesus' father and thus deny the virgin birth.

Response: If one is determined to prove the Bible false in order to justify an unwillingness to believe in God, then I suppose this argument might look like a good possibility, though it would take considerable mental gymnastics to maintain it. On the other hand, a little thought—and fairness—resolve the seeming problem.

First of all, neither Matthew nor Luke says or even implies that Joseph was the father of Jesus. On the contrary, both give a clear account of the fact that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born. One is entitled to reject the virgin birth of Christ, but it is absurd to justify that rejection by claiming that, in spite of clear statements that Joseph was *not* the father, Matthew and Luke nevertheless then turn right around and offer a genealogy saying that Joseph *was* the father.

Let's look at the genealogies. Matthew's carefully calls Joseph "the husband of Mary," *not* the father. He explains this apparent anomaly: when "Mary was espoused [engaged] to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost." He explains that Joseph "knew her not [had no sex with her] till* she had brought forth her firstborn son" (Matthew 1:25; cf. 1:16, 18). In addition, Matthew declares that the birth of Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy:

"Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (1:23).

Matthew's genealogy is definitely that of Joseph. This is clear because of the use of the word "begat" for each generation, ending with "Jacob begat Joseph, the *husband* of Mary" (1:16). Though not the father of Jesus, Joseph was the head of the household and functioned as the "adoptive father." Because the kingly line ran through the males, Joseph had to be of the house of David.

Luke's genealogy is just as clearly through Mary. The word "begat" is not used. Luke says that Jesus "was supposed [i.e., imagined]" to be the son of Joseph, who was "of Heli" (Luke 3:23). The word "son" is not in the original. Obviously Joseph was the *son-in-law* of Heli, Mary's father.

Logical Consistency

Luke gives the full account of the angel Gabriel's appearance to tell Mary that she would give birth to the Messiah. Her astonished response is recorded: "How shall this be, seeing I know not [have not had sex with] a man?" (1:34) Far from suggesting that Joseph was the father of Jesus, Luke makes it clear that he was *not*: that she was a virgin and that the Messiah was conceived in her by "the Holy Ghost" (1:35). Immediately thereafter Luke

isn't going to offer a genealogy telling us that Joseph *was*, after all, the father of Jesus! Let's give both Matthew and Luke credit for at least reasonable intelligence.

Nor would Luke contradict Matthew and come up with an entirely different genealogy for Joseph. Matthew tells us that Jacob was the name of Joseph's father and traces his full genealogy. The records were available in the temple and were also kept by each family. Even without consulting any records, Luke would at least know the name of Joseph's father and grandfather merely by talking to friends and neighbors.

And he wouldn't give an entire genealogy without knowing that it was accurate. Luke certainly knew the facts, "having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first . . . (Luke 1:3) and having taken great care to investigate so that he could apprise his friend Theophilus of "the certainty of those things . . ." (1:4). One can only conclude that he gives the genealogy through Mary, the mother of Jesus, and there is good reason why he should have done so.

That Jesus was born of a virgin meant that He had none of King David's blood, through male descent, in His veins. Therefore, to have a physical relationship to David, it was essential that His mother be descended from David. Consequently, Luke, whose focus has been almost entirely on Mary up to this point, supplies the missing information by giving us Mary's genealogy. To assert otherwise is to charge both Matthew and Luke with a stupidity that is clearly contrary to the intelligence and honesty to which their full testimonies bear such clear and convincing witness.

Matthew is quite clearly indicating that Mary and Joseph had a normal marriage relationship after *the birth of Jesus, thus denying the dogma of Mary's "perpetual virginity," which was invented some centuries later. This is consistent with both Matthew's and Luke's description of Jesus as Mary's* firstborn *(Matthew 1:25; Luke 2:7), implying the subsequent birth of other children, who often accompanied their mother, Mary (Matthew 12:46; Mark 3:32; Luke 8:20), some of whose names were even recorded for us (Matthew 13:55–56).*

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