

**Exegetical Notes, Luke 3:23-38**  
**“So It Was Thought”**

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**Luke 3:23-38**

**Verse 23**

*Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli,...*

- The Bible contains two genealogies of Jesus. The one which begins with these words in Luke’s Gospel and another one which is found in Matthew 1:1-17. These genealogies are remarkably similar until they come to David, the greatest of Israel’s kings. Matthew traces Jesus’ ancestry through Solomon, son of David and King of Israel to Joseph. Luke traces Jesus’ line through Nathan, one of David’s lesser known sons, who never ruled over Israel. Matthew says that Joseph’s father was Jacob. Luke says that Joseph’s father was Heli. While one might argue that ancient records could become confused with time, certainly everyone would have known who Joseph’s father was. So if the Biblical record is accurate, how do we reconcile these two divergent records?
- For most scholars the answer to that question is found in the oddly curious remark in this verse, “*so it was thought.*” The purpose of a genealogy is to establish rights to position with the family and rights of inheritance. Normally, these rights are traced through the father. However, Jesus had no earthly father. Joseph only acted as Jesus’ father but could not lay any biological connection to Jesus. The phrase, “*so it was thought*” implies that Joseph was not Jesus’ biological parent in fact, and would, therefore, make his genealogy traced through Joseph potentially invalid. Luke seems to throw Jesus’ right to Israel’s throne into question with this little phrase.
- Scholars believe that Jacob was Joseph’s natural father. And that Joseph was descended from King David through Solomon. By right of

adoption, as Joseph's son, Jesus could claim the right to be called David's son.

- Scholars believe that Heli was Mary's father, Joseph's father-in-law. Heli was descended from King David by Nathan. Therefore, by right of natural birth through Mary, Jesus could claim the right to be called David's son.
- Thus by right of adoption through Joseph's line and by natural right through Mary's line, Jesus is the son of David and has rights to Israel's throne.
- Luke may also have been aware that Jesus could not have inherited Israel's throne through Joseph's descent alone because of a technicality. In Matthew 1:12 the name Jeconiah appears. Jeconiah was cursed by God in Jeremiah 22:24, 28, and 37:1. (In these verses the name is Jehoiachin and is shortened to Coniah, but it is the same person.) Jeconiah's descendants were cut off by God and denied the right to claim Israel's throne. Thus Joseph's descendants could not claim the right to rule even though they were descended from David through Solomon. By tracing Jesus' descent through Mary, Luke eliminates this problem and declares that Jesus' claim to David's throne is by right of natural descent not through adoption.

### **Verse 24-37**

*(The text for this section of scripture is not copied here as it is a long list of names most of which are unknown to modern readers and many of which are forgotten to history.)*

- Genealogies were carefully structured to proclaim certain truths. Sometimes, as in both Matthew and Luke's genealogies of Jesus, the structures are contrived numerically. Generations may be overlooked or forgotten to provide the sought-for structure. The structure becomes a pictorial display of the truth the genealogy was designed to proclaim.
- For instance, Matthew divided the genealogy of Jesus into 3 sections each section containing 14 generations. There are 3 sections. 3 is the number of wholeness. Thus, he shows pictorially that the genealogy is complete. Each of the three sections contains 14 names. 14 is twice 7. 7 is the number which implies completion and perfection. Twice 7 implies total completion and absolute perfection. Thus, Matthew proclaims that Jesus is the fulfillment of the line. It all points to him and comes together in him.

- Luke traces Jesus lineage through 77 generations. There are eleven sequences of seven up to Jesus. The double 7s in 77 implies completion, the fullness of time. Jesus is the beginning of the twelve generation sequences which does not go beyond him. 12 is another number which symbolizes completion or fulfillment. Thus, Luke, too, declares through the structure of the genealogy that everything points to Jesus and finds its completion in him.
- Both genealogical structures declare the same thing. All history points to Jesus and is fulfilled in his coming. He is the son of David who sits on David's throne forever!

### **Verse 38**

***...the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.***

- Matthew's genealogy traces Jesus' ancestry to Abraham, the Father of the Hebrew nation. Luke traces Jesus' ancestry back to Adam, the first human. Matthew declares that Jesus is the King of the Jews. Luke shows him to be the Son of God.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *So It Was Thought*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)