



## THE MESSIAH'S RIGHT A Forgotten Essential:

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**A**midst the wonder and joy of Christmas with its central focus on the coming of the Christ child, there is an intricate, involved puzzle within the Incarnation story that is often overlooked or completely forgotten.

In this fourth and final article in our "Messiah in Both Testaments" series, being the Christmas edition, it is appropriate to draw attention to this regrettable omission!

All believers would be very familiar with the details of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, the angelic chorus praising God on High and the arrival of the shepherds at the stable to see baby Jesus lying in a manger (Luke 2:1-20). There would be few followers of Christ who could not recount the events associated with the worshipping gentile Magi<sup>(1)</sup> and Herod's subsequent, sinister plan to kill the incarnate Son of God and Joseph and Mary's fleeing with their precious Child to Egypt (Matthew 2:1-18). But has there ever been a time when any of us heard the genealogies of Jesus recorded in Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38 read publicly (or at least referred to) in any of our Christmas Services? If you have, that isolated instance would surely be the exception that proves the rule.

"Too tedious!" I hear you say. "Unnecessary!" others retort. "Totally irrelevant!" the majority contend.

Oh, really?

Leaving aside the practical issue of the time factor that would mitigate against revisiting these genealogies in an early morning Christmas Service where the children are all excited at the prospect of opening presents, Dad is fidgeting in the pew trying to remember if he'd bought enough drinks for the afternoon family cricket match in the backyard with the kids, and Mum is concentrating more on the roast in the oven than the sermon, let us take a few moments to highlight the essential aspect of the Christmas

story that is too often forgotten. Whether it's the Christmas season or any other time for that matter, it makes no difference: The fact is these instructive sections of God's Word are bypassed. And therein lies a spiritual tragedy for believers!

In what way is this a spiritual tragedy? The answer of course is simply this: Messiah's right to King David's throne – that key, eschatological<sup>(2)</sup> element indissolubly linked with the genealogies of Jesus. They provide

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the fundamental reason for **the hope** Christians have in the Lord Jesus Christ. He will come again to overthrow all His foes and set up His earthly, Millennial Kingdom in which His redeemed will be privileged to share their inheritance and participate as His "companions" or "co-sharing partners" (Greek: *metochoi*) in the administration of His kingly reign, centred in Jerusalem (Cf. Heb. 1:9; 3:1, 14; 4:9,11; 12:25-28f; Is. 2:1-4; Rev. 19:11-16; 21-22).

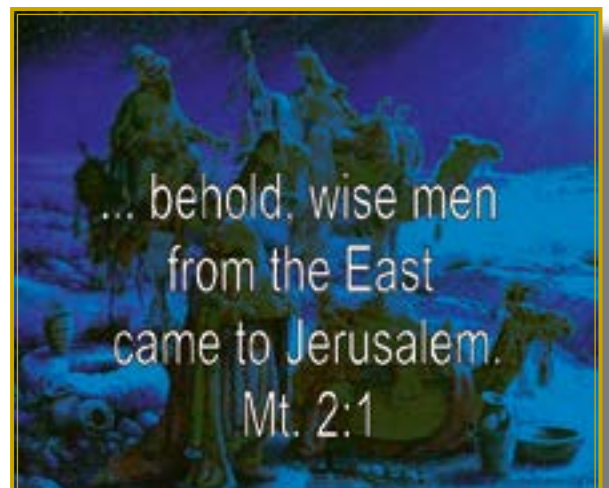
**The genealogies of the Incarnate Christ-Child therefore provide His credentials, His authenticity and His pedigree. In other words, they constitute the record of what may rightly be called His Certificate of Authenticity which justifies His claim to be Israel's Messiah, the world's only Saviour and coming King.**

Just as a Certificate of Authenticity certifies the genuineness of say, a watch, a diamond, or the pedigree or bloodline of an animal, so the possessor of such a document has tangible proof as to the credentials or genuineness of that to which it refers. Credentials certify authenticity. That is why God provided a Certificate of Authenticity for His Messiah through His eternal Word, and in particular the genealogies recorded in Matthew and Luke.

### UNRAVELLING THE PUZZLE!

To unravel the puzzle presented in Christ's two genealogies in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels, study the diagram<sup>(3)</sup> on page 2 of this article, carefully. In particular, note Jesus' **legal** and **physical** lines as a descendant of King David. Scripture is clear that the Messiah would be of the seed of David. This is mentioned specifically in 2 Sam. 7:7-14, esp. verses 10 and 16 ...

*I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; your house and*



your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.

Psalms 89 and 132 attest the same truth in regard to the "seed", "house" and the "throne/kingdom" – all interesting categories mentioned again specifically in Luke 1:31-33 as they relate to the announcement of Jesus' birth. Furthermore, He must be virgin born (Isa. 7:14) and yet have a **legal** right to David's throne. However, it must also be remembered that one of Solomon's descendants was the evil leader, Jeconiah, of whom Scripture records:

*"Is this man Coniah [Jeconiah] a despised broken idol - a vessel in which there is no pleasure? Why are they cast out, he and his descendants, and are cast into a land which they do not know? ... Thus says the LORD: "Write this man down as childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days, for none of his descendants shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah" (Jer. 22:28,30).*

Despite the fact that in Israel, **the right to the throne was transmitted only through the male line**, Christ was born of a virgin (Mt. 1:18-23). The Scriptures also expressly taught that the Messiah would inherit "the throne of David" (1 Chr. 17:11, 14; Ps. 132:11; Isa. 9:7; Jer. 33:15-17). But since He has to be born of a virgin, *how would He obtain the legal right to David's throne?*

The problem is therefore apparent: How could the curse of Jeconiah's sin be overcome? What could be the solution to this seemingly insurmountable barrier? Is it conceivable that all the Messianic prophecies of God's Word could be wrecked by the sin of this one, wicked descendant of Solomon?

Hallelujah – there's good news! God is certainly up to the task. He alone solved the otherwise unsolvable puzzle. Oh, the wonder of His infinite, prophetic plan! Did not Isaiah write these memorable words in relation to the One who would come and on whose shoulders

the government of divine right and authority would ultimately rest? Read the words again, thoughtfully: *"The zeal of the LORD of Hosts will perform this"* (Isa. 9:6-7, esp. verse 7). Praise God that Matthew's and Luke's Certificate of Authenticity reveals exactly how He had this seeming impossible puzzle solved from eternity past. Journey with the writer and marvel as God's incomparably wise, redemptive plan unfolded.<sup>(4)</sup>

### Jesus' Royalty

Matthew records the genealogy of Christ through **Joseph**. He begins in the first verse of his first chapter with these words: *"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham"*. Consider these striking observations:

First, Matthew emphasizes Jesus' **Royalty**. He presents Jesus to his Jewish audience in His divine role as King of the Jews (Cf. 2:2) and His (eventual) setting up of the Kingdom. This is why chapter 13 is rightly understood as the pivotal chapter in his twenty-eight-chapter Gospel account. Structurally speaking, it is the turning point in Jesus' ministry and mission. It seems that Matthew has chosen to make his point by arranging his material logically rather than chronologically, geographically or biographically. Matthew has also presented his argument in a "chiastic structure"<sup>(5)</sup>. This has important literary and theological implications for it deals with the Seven Parables of Judgement on Israel that **follow immediately** after their committing the **unpardonable sin** of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in chapter 12. Yes, He will build His church (Mt. 16:18 – one of only two occasions where church is referred to), but the Kingdom will be delayed, **contingent upon Israel's belief** in, and acceptance of The King! (Cf. Acts. 3:19-26, esp. verses 20 and 21).

Throughout the Old Testament (the Hebrew Tenach), the term depicting royalty (relative to the Messiah) is the **Branch**, as in Is. 11:1; Jer. 23:5 and 33:15. Note the significance of Jer. 23:5 in this context:

*"Behold the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of Righteousness: A King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*

### Jesus' Office

Secondly, Matthew highlights Jesus' **Office**. When we read the word **Christ**, it is not to be thought of as some form of a family name. Western minds tend to think of it in those terms. We are used to John SMITH, Bill BROWN, or Betty JONES and the like. His earthly name was Jesus (Mt. 1:21). That's the same as the Hebrew, 'Joshua'. It means **saviour** or **salvation**. When Matthew uses Jesus Christ, he is saying that

the importance of the **Name** and its being correctly placed in the context of lineage and genealogy. It underscored His Office. Messiah's credentials, authenticity and pedigree were essential for Matthew then and they are for us today!

### Jesus' Lineage

Thirdly, Matthew is concerned about **Lineage**. This coming One is the son of **David** and



Jesus is the **Saviour**, the **Anointed One** because the Greek term from which **Christ** comes ('Christos') is the equivalent of the Hebrew term **Messiah** ('Messiach'). What great significance there is here as Matthew uses such poignant designations! To his Jewish audience he is saying, in effect: Take a good look at the **Office** of this Kingly Person!

We do well to recall that four centuries had passed since the last prophetic voice had been heard in Israel. Malachi's message had fallen on deaf ears and the 400 **silent years** began. Now Matthew, the converted tax collector (Mt.9:9ff; Mk. 2:13-15; Lk. 9:27ff), concerned that all the intimate details of his account would give the correct bottom line conclusion, begins his five-part<sup>(6)</sup>, systematic, Narrative/Discourse account in his presentation of the **King** to the Jewish nation. And as a fellow Jew, he knew

Steve Herzig answered this question well when he wrote<sup>(7)</sup>:

*Doing so reaffirms God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12. God promised Abraham that if he left Ur to follow Him, He would unconditionally provide a land, seed, and blessing (vv.1-2). As a son of Abraham, Jesus would rule from the Promised Land, be the promised Seed, and be a blessing for His people. Further, in Abraham "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 22:18) ... Thus the Messiah's descent from Abraham ensures He is a blessing to all. And His descent from David ensures His royalty. If His lineage was questioned, the information was not recorded in the accounts of His life. With the Temple still standing at the time Matthew wrote, genealogies could be verified. That ability ceased with the A.D.70 destruction of the Temple and all the Jewish genealogical records it housed.*

*Today only Jesus can verify that He has the credentials to be Israel's legitimate King. Someday He will return to claim His throne and rule over a restored Davidic Kingdom.*

So Matthew's reference to Jesus being **the son of Abraham** is filled with Messianic connotations. This would give Him the right to the Land of Promise, the territorial possessions given to Abraham and his descendants forever and to a restored Davidic Kingdom. For that to eventuate something radical needed to be done relative to the curse of Jeconiah.

As one reads through the three groups of fourteen names in Matthew's genealogy, Joseph is said to be in the regal line of descent from David through Solomon. But Joseph was also a descendant of David through Jeconiah. This meant that succession to the throne for Joseph personally was barred. Matthew's genealogical record is very careful to show that Jesus was not a direct descendant of David through Joseph for verse 16 says: *"And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ."* (Emphases added).

Linking this with Luke's genealogical account, we find that Doctor Luke traces Christ's genealogy through Heli (Mary's father) right back to Adam and God (Lk. 3:23-38). This is noteworthy indeed! Jesus, the Messiah, is given a title deed Certificate of Authenticity **to the whole earth as the son of Adam** (Cf. Gen. 1:27,30; Ps. 8:4-6); Heb. 2:6-9; Rev. 5:1-10) and **to "all things" as the Son of God** (Cf. Heb. 1:2-11ff; Jn. 1:1-14; Rev. 19:11-16 and chapters 21 and 22).



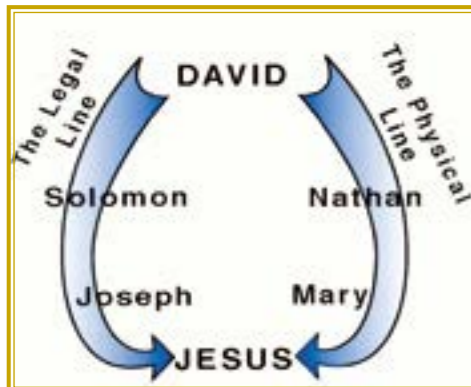
Luke's statement is clear: Christ's genealogy came through Mary. Heli was quite obviously her father. As such, Heli would have been Joseph's father-in-law (Lk. 3:23). Coupling this with Matthew 1:16, Jacob was the actual father of Joseph. Luke 3:23 states that *"Joseph ... was the son of Heli"*. The word son does not appear in the original text and has been supplied by the translators. We should therefore translate the verse more correctly as *son-in-law*, as Joseph could not have had two fathers. He was the "son of Heli" in the sense that he married Heli's daughter. This is legitimate and totally in accord with Jewish custom and practice (Cf. 1 Sam. 24:16).

By referring again to the genealogical diagram on page 2 of this article, one can see that Jesus' lineage is traced by Luke in terms of the physical line from David through **Nathan**. While Mary was in the Royal line from David, she was not in the regal lineage because of her being a descendant through Nathan. The right to the throne came through Solomon. We read in 1 Chron. 28:5-6 that:

*"And of all my sons ... He has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel. Now He said to me, 'It is your son Solomon who shall build My house and My courts; for I have chosen him to be My son, and I will be his Father'".*

We should not miss another essential point associated with the Christmas story. The Scriptures are unequivocal in regard to Joseph's marriage to Mary **before Christ was born**. This was an absolute necessity in order to remove the curse on Jeconiah. And this is exactly what happened! The sacred record attests:

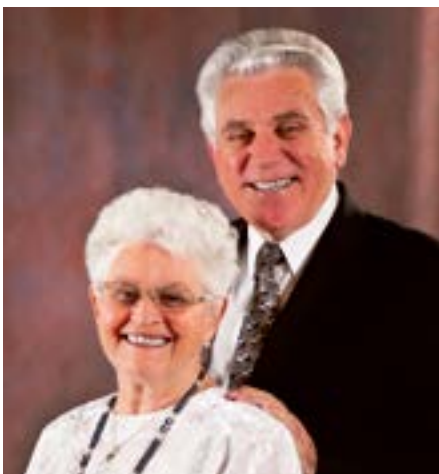
*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit ... But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit". (Matt. 1:18-20)*



So God's Word reveals yet again just what an awesome, just, gracious, salvation-providing God He is. He sent His only begotten Son into the world to fulfill all the Messianic prophecies. In a miraculous, wonderful way through Mary, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah and soon coming King, obtained His **literal** descent from King David. From her marriage to Joseph, a son of David, He obtained His **legal** right to David's throne, for Mary was Joseph's wife **before Jesus was born**, making Joseph his legal (foster) father. In this whole divinely orchestrated process, the curse of Jeconiah was removed. In God's infinitely wise way, the prophecy concerning him was fulfilled as well, for Jesus was in no way a direct descendant of Jeconiah.

## UNDERSTANDING THE PROMISE!

So the next time your pastor commences his Christmas sermon and takes the congregation through the oh-so-familiar Christmas story – true and wonderful as it is, and ever shall be! – and you begin to succumb to the mental exercise of thinking of unopened presents, or the drinks for thirsty kids after “(making) a 100 in the back yard, at Mum's”<sup>(6)</sup> or worrying about the roast, stop ... sit back ... relax ... and with a thankful heart understand afresh God's faithful Christmas promise to you and all who



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would believe – that forgotten essential of the Christmas Story – **The Messiah's right to the Throne of David!**

Other people will still side-step Matthew's and Luke's genealogies as if they were landmines! Dismissed as *tedious, unnecessary and irrelevant*, these spiritual gems sparkle forever as Messiah's **credentials**, His **authenticity** and His impeccable, sinless **pedigree** – A veritable Certificate of Authenticity that guarantees to believing Jews and Gentiles alike:

- The assurance of **sins forgiven!**
- The **reality of a restored relationship** with the covenant-keeping God of the Bible!
- The **secured hope and inexpressible joy** of sharing with, and serving the King in His Kingdom, and then in the Eternal State forever, to the praise of His glorious grace!

Have you made room for great David's **Greater Son** in the Inn of your heart?

## ENDNOTES

1. It is noteworthy to observe that Matthew's Gospel portrays Jesus as the King of the Jews (2:2), yet because God's blessing is promised on all nations through the Abrahamic covenant (Cf. Gen. 12:1-3, esp.verse 3 and Gal.3:13-14), one finds gentiles worshipping the Christ-child at the beginning of the Gospel. Then in the last chapter, the risen Christ commissions His disciples to “*Make disciples*” of all nations (28:19-20). This literary inclusion is therefore striking in the total context of Matthew's Gospel.
2. The term alludes to the **study of the ‘Last Things’** (Greek: *eschatos*, meaning [to do with the] last, final [events that consummate history]); and *logos*, meaning study or message about a subject.
3. This present writer is indebted to John Ecob, The Herald of Hope, P.O. Box 4216, Marayong, NSW 2148 for permission to use this Chart. His acknowledgement and gratitude is hereby expressed.
4. What follows has been based on the excellent treatment of this subject by Fred John Meldau in his book *Messiah in Both Testaments*. This volume is now out of print but has been published under another title by The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry Inc. See The Prophets Still Speak: Messiah In Both Testaments, The Friends Of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc. Revised Edition, 2006, Pp. 51-53.
5. The term refers to a literary method used by writers to emphasize a certain point or points in their argument and presentation. A chiasm is a way of structuring one's material using inverted parallelism. For instance, the chiastic structure of a whole book, means the author has arranged blocks of material in a carefully balanced way, so that the first block of material in the book will in some way correspond to the last block of material in the book; the second block of material will then correspond to the second to last block of material in the book ... and so on, until one comes to the central axis of the book. This axis or core is in some way the most important part of the structure because it makes the book's central and pivotal point. Thus a chiasm (from the Greek letter *chi* [which in English looks like an ‘X’], is more than a fancy structure – it actually directs the reader's attention to the centre of the argument, which then becomes the key itself.
6. Note the parallel here to the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
7. Steve Herzig is the Director of the North American Missions with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry. Refer to his article found in that Mission's bimonthly magazine, *Israel My Glory*, November-December, 2008, Volume 66, Number 6 *Matthew 1: Certificate of Authenticity*, Pp. 28-29.
8. The words quoted are from Greg Champion's well known Australian Children's Folk Song, *I Made A 100*, © Greg Champion, Warner/Chappell Music, Australia.

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