

The Incarnation Part 8 - 'Luke's Genealogy of Messiah'

by Charles Alexander

The sermon explores the significance of Luke's account of the birth of Christ, highlighting the natural descent of Christ and the importance of the date of the birth of Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 1:1, Matthew 13:16, Luke 1:3, Luke 2:1, Luke 3:23, John 1:1, Acts 17:31, 1 Corinthians 15:47, Hebrews 12:22

Topics: "Christology", "Divine Providence"

Description

Charles Alexander delves into Luke's detailed account of the birth of Jesus Christ, emphasizing Luke's unique perspective as a historian with perfect understanding of the events. Luke's genealogy traces Christ's lineage back to Adam, showcasing the divine providence and fulfillment of prophecies. The careful dating of events in Luke 2:1-2 highlights God's sovereignty over history, even using Caesar's decree for His divine purposes. The sermon explores the significance of Christ's birth in a humble stable, contrasting the truth of the incarnation with the world's skepticism and evolutionary theories.

Transcript

In Luke 2:1-20 we read Luke's account of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, containing details so wonderful, tender and sweet in their nature, and which only he has recorded. He tells us, at the beginning of his gospel, that he had perfect understanding of all things from the beginning, though he was not there when any of these events took place. He was not on the hillside with the shepherds, and it is highly unlikely that he was in Bethlehem at that time, yet he knew all about it. He was a physician who had conversed with Mary about the wonderful things which had taken place, and she had spoken freely to him. In the providence of God, Luke understood all these things, and was able to set them down. He was the only one who had all the complete information. He said (1:3) that he had "perfect understanding of all things from the very first," which makes him a historian par excellence.

He was a historian above all historians, in that he knew the inner meaning and purport of these things, and how they dovetailed into the pattern of the divine providence: things which happened on earth, which were heavenly in their nature. There are four accounts of the earthly life of our Lord, written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Only two of these accounts refer to the birth of Christ: those by Matthew and Luke. Mark begins his narrative with the ministry of John the Baptist, thirty years after the birth of John and the One from Heaven of whom he was the forerunner: our Saviour Jesus Christ, known at that time as Jesus of

Nazareth.

John does not refer to the birth of Christ, but he goes back to His eternal origin (John 1:1-3): In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. Far from His having derived life from mankind, John goes on to say (v.4-5), In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. So John by-passes the birth of Christ, and goes right back before creation. He says that in the beginning of time, in the beginning of creation, He was; and He eternally is. And there is divine wisdom and power personified in the only- begotten Son.

Matthew and Luke, in their accounts, have a genealogy. Matthew traces the genealogy of Christ back to David and Abraham, and so the New Testament opens with these words: The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. The genealogy is then set down, beginning with, Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob....., and so on up to verse 16. The genealogy ends with: And Jacob (a different one, of course) begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. Luke also has a genealogy which occurs in the third chapter, where he traces the genealogy of Christ back in reverse, from the birth to Mary at Bethlehem right back through all the generations to Adam, contrary to the usual genealogies in the Bible, which say "so and so begat so and so," tracing it back from the beginning to the latest day, as Matthew does. Luke, in reverse, says in the beginning of his genealogy (3: 23-24), Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli, which was the son of Mat-that, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Mel-chi, and so on, right back (v.38) to: the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God. And there we perceive how Luke's account was so different from all others.

It is generally believed that Matthew wrote first, and that the gospels were written in the order in which we find them. However, some Bible critics say Mark was written first, and all the others copied from him. Where, then, did Luke get the details of the birth of Christ from, and also his account of the Lord's first appearance in the temple at the age of twelve? It would be rather puzzling if he copied from Mark, because Mark has nothing whatever to say about these important facts. No, it was Matthew who wrote first, and he knew that he was writing first because, as we have already pointed out, he begins his book as being the start of the New Testament: The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. That is clearly the prologue of the entire New Testament, which is the disclosure of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Mark wrote second, and Luke wrote third, late on in the Christian era, but before the expiration of the Apostolic Age during the time of the Apostles. John, in all probability, wrote long after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, probably near the time when he received on the Isle of Patmos the visions which we know as the book of Revelation.

So we have the four gospels, each one of them independent, shedding its separate light upon the incarnation, this glorious thing which God has done. When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory, said David in one of his great Psalms. That means that the Lord came to fulfil all prophecy, in the building up of the spiritual Zion, a gospel city to which you and I have come. Paul says (Hebrews 12:22-24), But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. That is what is meant by "Coming to Zion." When David said, When the

Lord shall build up Zion; he shall appear in his glory, this was a prophecy that God would appear, at the time when Zion was to be delivered. That is, that He would be visible, that men would see God with their natural eyes; they saw Him and they crucified Him.

But there were those whose eyes were open to see His glory. Jesus said (Matthew 13:16-17), Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them. That was not given to them, but it is given to you. Blessed are our eyes too, if we see; and our ears, if we hear. We love to sing the Christmas song,

"Once in royal David's city," two verses of which follow :

And our eyes at last shall see Him, Through His own redeeming love;

For that child so dear and gentle, Is our Lord in heaven above;

And He leads His children on, To the place where He is gone.

Not in that poor lowly stable, With the oxen standing by,

We shall see Him, but in Heaven,

Set at God's right hand on high;

When like stars His children crowned,

All in white shall wait around.

Blessed indeed are the eyes which see and the ears which hear this wondrous story. Satan has a special spite against the story of Christ, whom he hates, and will seek to pour scorn upon the account which he knows to be true, which he would withhold from the sinful hearts of the men and women of this world. He would even quarrel with Luke's genealogy; he would say it is entirely different from Matthew's, and so it is. It might be a genealogy of two different men entirely, because there is a collection of names in Luke's account which simply does not occur in Matthew's. And yet, the two accounts are in agreement from Abraham to David. What is the cause of this disagreement, as it were, between Luke and Matthew about the true ancestry of our Lord Jesus Christ? It is too long a story to go into detail, but the critics scoff in vain, and Satan rages in vain against this story, because in Matthew we have the legal dynasty of Christ, descended from David as the true King of Israel by His reputed father Joseph, who was not His father. In the mystery of a virgin birth which took place within the boundaries of the matrimonial estate which existed between Joseph and Mary, He became the legal occupant of the throne of His Father David. Whereas in Luke's genealogy we have not the dynastic descent of Christ, but the natural descent; and He is still the son of David, but by another line, and the line appears to cross and criss-cross in the course of the generations.

A most wonderful story! If it did not occur in the Bible, we would be amazed at it; but we are truly amazed at the mystery of God who arranges the generations, right back to David, right back to Abraham, right back beyond to Adam. The only person in the world whose complete genealogy and pedigree we have got, going right back to creation, is that of the creator Himself; there are no others in the wide world who can trace their ancestry back to Adam. We have intimations from within that we came from Adam: the old

Adam, the old man, the old nature! Yes we came from Adam alright, but the only one ever to trace His ancestry right back to Adam, via David and Abraham, is none other than the great Creator Himself, who had made man in the beginning. How wonderful! How marvellous!

That is something worth pondering about. Perhaps it never struck you before; maybe you have never heard it said before. You know it to be true, but you have never thought of the significance of it; and yet here it is! Satan may rage in vain, but the genealogies are complementary one to the other; the one sustains the other. One gives us the dynasty, the other the natural pedigree. They indicate the legal entitlement of Christ to the throne; He was the legitimate heir of David the king, and there was no other to compete. And yet, at the same time, His ancestry is to be traced naturally back to the same origin and way beyond that to Adam, as it criss-crosses through David and Abraham and through other names besides, as the true and lawful second Adam, who came to fulfil the promise made. The seed of Adam and Eve would bruise the serpent's head, and now the time had arrived when the original promise was about to be fulfilled in Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, the supposed son of Joseph, the Son of God, the son of David and Abraham, the son of Adam. He was the second Adam, who, as the hymn writer has said, "to the fight and to the rescue came". In 1 Corinthians 15: 47, Paul said, The first man (Adam) is of the earth, earthy: the second man (Christ) is the Lord from heaven.

Now we see something else very wonderful in Luke 2:1-2 which we have remarked upon before, and that is the careful dating of the events. "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus....."; Julius Caesar had no sons, so after his murder in Rome his nephew Augustus became emperor, and inaugurated the great era of peace, which has ever since been known as the Augustan age. "There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed." Taxing means enrolment for the purpose of taxing. They were not taxed there and then; the history of that time records that it was several years before the money was actually exacted from the people. Society was not so well organised as it is in our day, when everyone has a birth certificate. Births are all recorded in Somerset House in this country, and in its equivalent in other countries, and they know where you are and how to find you, right throughout your lifetime; you cannot get away from your origin. Well the earth was not so finely organised in those days, and the census must have taken some considerable time.

But Luke is concerned only about one portion of it, and this is a remarkable thing. He says, This taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. The critics get to work upon that and say that Cyrenius was not governor of Syria until several years later, which is quite true. Luke puts in that little word "first". This taxing was "first" made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. Clearly, he means that the registration took place at the time when Caesar Augustus sent forth the decree, but they imposed the tax several years later, on the basis of that registration, when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. The Roman Empire was a tremendous size and communications were difficult. They did not have radio and television, the electric telegraph and things like that to transmit messages almost as soon as they occurred, from one end of the earth to the other. It took time for couriers to travel, either by land or by land and sea, as the case may be. Sometimes the journeys took months; therefore things did not happen with the same speed as they would today, and there was considerable delay.

The registration was first made years before, and then the taxes were imposed and collected, at the time when Cyrenius was governor of Syria, and so the critics are wrong again. They are right in the fact that the date of Cyrenius, governor of Syria, did not correspond with the actual birth of Christ, and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem with Mary his espoused wife. It was eleven years later, when Cyrenius was governor of Syria, that the taxing was made. But our translators rightly put that verse in brackets.

Clearly, the taxing was not made until Cyrenius was governor of Syria, but the registration had taken place years before; otherwise, there would be no reason at all for Joseph's journey all the way from Galilee at such an inconvenient time, when Mary's child was almost ready to be born. They came down at great inconvenience at the last minute to Bethlehem because it was required that the registration should be made in Judea, every man in the city where he was born, and to which he belonged. Joseph was an emigrant from Judea to Galilee; for whatever reason we do not know, except that it was a divine and prophetic reason. He had to come to Bethlehem (the place of his birth) for the registration; so he came and there was no room for them in the inn, because it was full of people who had come for the same purpose. They were late arrivals and there was no room for them in the inn. Hence the strangeness of the birth: the stable, the manger, the cattle lowing, the asses gathering round. As it was night-time, the inn was quiet and the animals were folded for the night. This was the only place available for God to become incarnate; not born in the king's palace, but wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger. That is a story which could not possibly have been invented; it bears all the marks of truth from beginning to end. When I read this account of the birth of Christ, a sense of the glory of it, the majesty, the divinity of it overwhelms my mind and soul and feeling; I know that it is true, and history proves it to be so.

Luke was an exact historian, a consummate historian; he traces the genealogy of Christ right back to Adam, and Luke does not miss a generation; he traces it back from the Bible, and he is inspired. There are no gaps in Luke's genealogy, and comparing it with the times which are recorded in the Old Testament, man was almost precisely four thousand years old when Christ was born, and he is now six thousand years old. But surely the scientists have proved that man's origin goes back millions of years, and that he arose from other forms of life, gradually, until he became man as we know him today?

They tell us that man was preceded by millions and millions of years, by pre-historic monsters, which millions of years ago disappeared from the face of the earth. An article entitled "Footprints in Stone" describes the discovery of the footprints of a dinosaur and of modern man, fossilised in the same rock formation. The following is a quotation from this article: "The theory of evolution is heavily dependent upon its own theoretic time table, known as the Geological Column.

This is an assumed order of levels of rock, in which fossils are found. By this arrangement scientists assert the time scale of millions of years. Once this column, which is no-where to be found in the Earth's crust, is shattered, the pillars of the evolutionary theory crumble." It is this which "Footprints in Stone" achieves to a marked extent. It does so by following up rumours of remarkable fossils in a river bed in Texas, U.S.A. which has long been famous for its undisputed dinosaur footprints, fossilised in rock.

But some of the old timers in the district remembered seeing, and even digging out, human footprints from the same layers of rock. With care and persistence, scientific Christians have searched until they found, not just one, but a whole series of human footprints, alongside the dinosaur footprints; the same footprints as you would leave if you were walking in the sand at the sea shore and the mud was suddenly fossilised by some enormous catastrophe which overtook the globe.

This we know was the flood, the only thing that could fossilise things, as these had to be fossilised in a moment of time. The place is full of dinosaur footprints, and alongside them human footprints of homo sapiens, footprints such as we would leave behind. Now this is indisputable, beyond all question; consequently seventy million years were wiped out at one stroke, and the whole support for the Geological Column undermined. Scientists were invited to look at the evidence for themselves; some found it too much to take, and could not believe that the facts could be right, and that their theories were wrong.

Beyond dispute, man is only six thousand years old. He is a recent arrival in creation, the latest arrival; he was made man, and never was anything other than man. The ramshackle apes which get reconstructed out of a handful of bones, that you find humping their way through some of our museums, were never men at all. They are only guess-work by the anatomists, in their frantic endeavour to produce a succession of beings, leading up from the lower orders of creation until we reach mankind.

And on the basis of that Satanic lie is constructed modern psychology. The reason for the breakdown of law and order and morality in the western world today, and the overturning of our present civilisation, is due to the evolutionary lie which Satan has foisted upon us; this can be proved.

Luke traces all the generations of mankind right back to Adam, who was the son of God, not the son of an ape. He was the direct creation of God, says Luke, who had perfect understanding of all things from above, from Him who was the beginning. As the origin and history of mankind is more recent than people realise, so is our future limited too. As the coming of Christ was dated, so the end of our human race is rapidly drawing on, we believe. There are tokens round about us that Satan is having his last attack upon God, in the only way he can, which is through the works of His hands. The highest work of God was man whom Satan seeks to destroy and defile. Christ, the son of man and the Son of God came forth, born of a virgin in such lowly and meek circumstances, so gentle and mild, so weak and frail, and lived His brief life of thirty-three and a half years, down here below, and died upon the cruel tree, which was the object of His coming.

All history was to this end. Caesar Augustus did not know about it; he thought, when he commanded all the world to be registered and taxed, that it was something for his own convenience, and the convenience of his empire. But God arranged it, that we might have a date; God arranged it that we might know exactly and precisely when it was that our Lord Jesus Christ came, and how His coming fulfilled the prophecies of Daniel; how Daniel's mystic seventy weeks was completed, which spanned the gap between the last of the prophets, and the coming of the Prophet of the prophets, our Saviour Jesus Christ. And so all history belongs to God; it does not belong to Caesar; it does not belong to our Prime Minister; it does not belong to any man upon the earth. It belongs to God upon the throne, and He has measured out the days, the generations, the centuries. As Luke says (Acts 17:31): He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Amen

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