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The Jesus Dynasty

Stunning New Evidence About the Hidden History of Jesus

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I

A VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE

When I think of Mary the mother of Jesus I think of the forgotten city of Sepphoris. According to tradition Mary was the firstborn daughter of an older couple named Joachim and Anna who lived there.[1] Few today have heard of Sepphoris. It is not mentioned in the New Testament. Until fairly recently it was not even included on those maps of the Holy Land found in the back of many Bibles. It had become a lost city to us—until very recently.

I first took my students to excavate at Sepphoris in the summer of 1996. We returned in 1999 and 2000 to participate in two more seasons of excavations. We joined one of the teams, led by Professor James Strange of the University of South Florida, who had begun digging there in 1983. After more than two decades of excavations by several teams of archaeologists, not even one-tenth of the ancient Roman city has been exposed. Yet enough has been done to begin to offer us a glimpse of the splendor of the place in the time of Mary and her son Jesus.

When Jesus was growing up in Nazareth, Sepphoris was the dominant city of the entire region. Built on a hill rising four hundred feet above the flat plain below, it is still visible from miles around. Jesus' well-known saying that a "city set on a hill cannot be hid" surely came to him

growing up in Nazareth and looking north at the gleaming city of Sepphoris four miles away. It could not be missed. Nazareth was hardly anything. Nestled in the hills, just to the southeast by a spring, the total population was probably not more than 200. It was one of dozens of small villages that dotted the plain around the huge and impressive capital city.

Today things are reversed. Nazareth is the largest Arab city in Israel with a population of over 60,000, half Christian, half Muslim. It literally fills the hills and valleys around its center with impressive suburbs and magnificent churches. Christian tours invariably include it as a major stop on their itinerary. Sepphoris is merely a bare hill dotted with ancient ruins in the distance. Every day at our excavations we would sit on the southern slopes of the ruins of Sepphoris and eat our lunch, gazing across the valley at the bustling city of Nazareth gleaming in the late morning sun. We tried to imagine how different things must have been in Jesus' day, with the prominence of the two locations reversed. Though living in a small village, Jesus grew up just outside the urban capital of Galilee. The implications of this geographical fact are enormous as we seek to historically recapture hidden or forgotten aspects of the early life of Jesus.

When Mary was born, around the year 18 B.C., the Romans occupied the northern area of Palestine called Galilee. Sepphoris was a Jewish city, but the Romans had made it the administrative center for the entire region. Herod the Great ruled the country. He had been an intimate friend of Antony and Cleopatra. The Roman general Octavian, later to reign as Caesar Augustus, confirmed him as "King of the Jews." And yet Herod lacked the vital Davidic bloodline that would have entitled him to such a throne.[2] Herod had a Jewish mother but an Idumean father. He was sensitive about his half-Jewish origins, which many Jews considered a disqualification for legitimate rule over Israel. Out of jealousy and fear he ordered the public genealogical records of the leading Israelite families destroyed. He also married Mariamne, a princess of the priestly Hashmoneans, in a vain effort to placate Jewish opposition to his base origins. The Hashmonean line is the one that produced the Maccabees, who had ruled the country for a century before the Romans invaded Palestine. In a

fit of rage Herod later murdered her and their two sons. Josephus, the 1st-century Jewish historian, tells us that Herod went so far as to equip the desert fortress Masada as a place to flee should the population depose him and restore a ruler of David's royal line.[3] The Roman emperors Vespasian and Domitian would search out and execute members of the royal "house of David" family in the late decades of the 1st century.[4] In those times power was one thing, but pedigree—particularly that of the native royal family—was quite another. And this matter of pedigree takes us right back to Nazareth.

In 4 B.C. when Mary would have been about fourteen, Herod the Great died. Shortly after his death, a certain Judas son of Ezekias broke into the royal palace at Sepphoris. After seizing all the arms that were stored there, he and his followers began to rampage throughout Galilee. Pockets of revolt and opposition to Rome broke out all over the country.[5] Josephus wrote that at that time "anyone might make himself king as the head of a band of rebels," and he named several others who tried.[6] The Romans reacted quickly and with overwhelming force. The Roman governor of Syria, the infamous Publius Quintilius Varus, led three legions from Syria to brutally crush opposition to Roman rule.[7] Including auxiliary forces as many as twenty thousand troops poured into the country from the north, burnt Sepphoris to the ground, and sent its inhabitants into slavery as punishment for their participation in the outbreaks. Varus rounded up rebels all over the country and crucified two thousand men who had participated in the revolt.[8] The trauma that gripped Galilee must have been dreadful, with dying men nailed to crosses at intervals up and down the main roads or on hillsides visible to all who passed.

Following the revolt the Romans divided Palestine into three districts, each ruled by a son of Herod the Great. Archelaus received Judea, which was in the south and included the mountainous territory to the north called Samaria. Philip was given charge of the region east of the Jordan, around the Sea of Galilee. Herod Antipas received the territory of Galilee, north of Judea, as well as Perea, east of the Jordan River. This was the same Herod that later beheaded John the Baptizer and participated in the trial of Jesus. Herod Antipas chose to fortify and rebuild the city of Sepphoris, making it his palatial capital, and he did it in high

Greco-Roman style. It occupied a strategic location overlooking the Bet Netofa Valley with major roads intersecting. Though it remained a Jewish city it had a 4,000-seat theater (as impressive as the one his father had built at Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast), colonnaded streets and markets, elaborate civic buildings, an elaborate water system, and public baths. Josephus, who was eyewitness to its splendor, writes that Sepphoris became the "ornament of all Galilee."[9] But as Herod Antipas consolidated his hold over his bequeathed territories, his legitimacy to the throne was suspect. Who was the rightful King of Israel?

Sometime before the conflagration of Sepphoris, Mary and her family moved to the little village of Nazareth, just four miles southeast. We have no record of what happened to her parents, Joachim and Anna, or whether they were still alive at the time, but we do know what became of their daughter.[10]

At the time of the revolt and brutal suppression, Mary, age fourteen or fifteen, was already considered a woman and was pledged in marriage to a local artisan named Joseph. It was there in Nazareth at this time that she had her own troubles—she got pregnant before the marriage and Joseph was not the father. Luke says that when the couple went to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus Mary was still his "betrothed" (Luke 2:5). The Greek word he uses is very clear.[11] It means they were still only engaged yet she was ready to deliver the child. After the birth of her child in Bethlehem the couple returned to Nazareth, right in the aftermath of the disaster, with the smoke of Sepphoris scarcely cleared.[12]

With an understanding of the history of Sepphoris a whole new set of images is added to the "Christmas story": crucified corpses rotting on crosses, the nearby capital city in flames, and fellow citizens either killed or exiled into slavery. The future of this family and the child that they carried was hardly certain.

GOSPEL SOURCES

As we begin to reconstruct the birth, life, and teachings of Jesus our best and earliest sources are the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, contained in the New Testament. For the past two hundred years schol-

ars have analyzed and compared these texts and their relationship to one another. The results of this painstaking research have allowed us to read them more carefully, and to use them responsibly as we do other ancient historical sources, even though they are included in the New Testament canon as sacred texts of Scripture. All four New Testament Gospels are written in Greek though we have an ancient tradition that the gospel of Matthew was originally composed in Hebrew or Aramaic. The names associated with these gospels are traditional and the authors, whoever they might have been, never identify themselves by name. Mark is our earliest gospel, even though it comes second in the New Testament. Mark was written around A.D. 70, and it provides us with the basic narrative framework of the career of Jesus. Matthew was written next, likely around A.D. 80, and the author uses Mark as his main source but edits it freely, as we will see. As I will explain more fully later, the author of Matthew also had access to a collection of the teachings of Jesus that we call Q, which Mark did not have. He incorporates that material into his work as well. Luke was written around A.D. 90 and the author uses both Mark and the Q source, but he has a considerable amount of his own material with which he supplements his story. These three gospels, Mark, Matthew, and Luke, are called the Synoptics, because of the tight literary relationship between them. One simple way of putting this is that Mark provides the basic story line, and both Matthew and Luke use Mark but incorporate Q and some of their own materials. John is our latest gospel, written toward the close of the 1st century, and it has no literary connection to the three Synoptic gospels. The author of John offers us an entirely independent tradition focusing on Jesus as a divine and exalted Son of God. In that sense John is more theologically oriented but that is not to say his account is devoid of valuable historical information. As we shall see, without John's independent record we would lack many important geographical and chronological details.

There are other gospels than these four, such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, written in Coptic and discovered in 1945 in Egypt; a Hebrew version of Matthew passed down within rabbinic circles; and a half-dozen so-called "Apocryphal" gospels that were composed in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. These will be introduced and discussed as we encounter them in our

investigation. But it remains the case that our most reliable sources for reconstructing what we can know about Jesus are the New Testament gospels themselves. As we shall see, when they are read carefully and critically many new and fascinating insights emerge. We begin our investigation with what we can know about Mary's pregnancy and the birth of her firstborn son, Jesus.

TROUBLE IN NAZARETH

One can try to imagine the stir Mary's pregnancy must have caused in a village the size of Nazareth. To say that tongues were wagging would be an understatement. Both families were well known.[13] Houses were close together, with married children often living in extensions of the main house of their parents, sharing a common courtyard. Village life was intensely interdependent both economically and socially, a fact driven home to me when I first visited "Nazareth Village." There, at a site in the modern city of Nazareth, archaeologists are reconstructing an authentic version of a 1st-century Jewish village.[14] One can enter the small rooms of the houses, walk in the common courtyards and narrow streets, and sense the unavoidable intertwining that must have involved every aspect of life. There were not many secrets in Nazareth.

Joseph had a serious problem that no fiancé wants even to imagine. He was engaged to Mary, their families had agreed to a marriage, but his bride-to-be "was found to be with child" before the wedding (Matthew 1:18). According to the Gospel of Matthew, Joseph was the one who had discovered the pregnancy, and resolved to break off plans for the marriage while keeping things quiet so as not to shame her. Perhaps he planned to help her leave town and bear her child in secret. We are not told. One thing he knew for certain: he was not the father of the unborn child. With or without his help Mary left town hastily and, according to tradition, went south to the little village of Ein Kerem, four miles west of Jerusalem in the hill country of Judea. There Mary stayed for three months with close family relatives, an older couple, Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1:39). Elizabeth was pregnant herself at the time, in her sixth month, with the child we know as John the Baptist or, more literally,

John the Baptizer. How Mary and Elizabeth were related we don't know, whether cousins, or perhaps niece and aunt, but given these circumstances the two families were likely very close. And this means that Jesus and John the Baptizer were related as well.

According to Luke the birth took place in Bethlehem in response to a Roman tax census. Bethlehem, just outside of Jerusalem, in Judea, is in the south of the country, while Nazareth is in the north in Galilee, about a three-day journey apart. Luke tells us that the couple, finding the city overcrowded and all guest rooms booked, lodged in a stable, where Jesus was born. It is common to find cavelike structures from that time hollowed out of the rock and attached to dwellings, used to shelter domestic animals. Since, according to Luke, Joseph and his betrothed Mary were not yet married, we don't know when the wedding took place, but it had to be after the birth of the child (Luke 2:5). Luke later refers to Jesus as "a son of Joseph" yet he clearly does not believe that Joseph is the father. He implies by this language that the couple married and Joseph became the legal adoptive father of Jesus (Luke 4:22). Matthew says that Joseph "took his wife," but he does not say when. He adds a fascinating note—that the couple only had sexual relations after the birth of the child (Matthew 1:25).[15] This would fit with Luke's implication that the marriage took place after the birth. In Jewish culture the sexual act of "knowing" the woman is what consummated the marriage.[16]

That is the bare outline presented in the first chapters of the gospels of Matthew and Luke.[17] The other two gospels, Mark and John, begin their accounts with Jesus as an adult and tell us nothing at all about his birth.[18]

Matthew and Luke both agree on the source of Mary's pregnancy. In Matthew's account Joseph had a dream shortly after finding out about the pregnancy. In this dream an angel told him that her pregnancy was "by a holy spirit" and that he was to go ahead with the marriage regardless.[19] He was to name her child Jesus. By marrying a pregnant woman who carried a child that was not his, and legally naming that child, he was in effect "adopting" Jesus as his legal son. The phrase "by a holy spirit" implies that the pregnancy came from the agency of God's spirit but falls short of saying, outright, that God was the father of Jesus in the sense that, say, Zeus was said to be the father of Hercules by his seduction of

his mother, Alkmene. In that sense the account is different from those miraculous birth stories so common in Greco-Roman mythology.

Matthew also alludes to an ancient saying of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah, "A young woman shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel," as if to say that Mary's pregnancy was a fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 7:14).[20] But Isaiah was speaking of a child to be born in *his own day*, the 8th century B.C., and whose birth would be a sign for King Hezekiah, who ruled at that time. The Hebrew word *('almah)* that Matthew puts as "virgin" in his Greek translation means a "young woman" or "maiden" and carries no miraculous implications whatsoever.[21] The child is given the unusual name of Immanuel, meaning "God with us," and Isaiah assures King Hezekiah that before this special child was old enough to know "right from wrong" the Assyrians who threatened Jerusalem and Judea would be removed from the land. Hezekiah would not have long to wait. Matthew implies that Isaiah's prophecy was "fulfilled" by the miraculous virgin birth of Jesus—but the original text clearly carries no such meaning.

In Luke's account it is Mary who had a dream. The angel Gabriel told her that she would become pregnant, bear a son, and name him Jesus. The name Jesus in Hebrew is the same as the name Joshua and was quite common among Jews at that time. This child was to be great. He would be called "the son of the Most High" and sit on the throne of his father David, ruling over the nation of Israel forever. Mary responded, "How will this be since I don't know a man?" This biblical expression definitely means to have sex. The angel replied that "a holy spirit will come upon you and power of the Most High will overshadow you, so the holy thing begotten will be called the son of God" (Luke 1:35).

The earliest Christian creeds affirm, based on these texts, that Jesus was "conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary."[22] It is easy to confuse the "immaculate conception" with the "virgin birth." The Immaculate Conception, as taught by the Roman Catholic Church, refers to the conception of Mary by her mother Anna, not to the conception of Jesus. This teaching holds that Mary was born without "original sin," inherited by every human being since Adam. This allowed her to give birth to Jesus in a special state of moral purity. The "virgin birth" is a further teaching—

that Mary, without a man, became pregnant through the agency of the Holy Spirit. It refers more to the source of the pregnancy than to the "birth" itself.[23] One might refer to the idea as the "virginal conception," since the focus is on the cause of her pregnancy.

A further Catholic dogma holds that Mary remained a perpetual virgin (*semper virgine*, "ever-virgin") her entire life.[24] Even Protestant leaders such as Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and John Wesley shared this view, though it is less common among Protestants today.[25] Mary was idealized over time as the divine-like holy "Mother of God." She was so far removed from her culture and her time that the very idea that she had sexual relations, bore additional children, and lived a normal life as a married Jewish woman seemed unthinkable for centuries. She was quite literally "exalted to heaven," and her actual humanity was lost, as was the importance of her forefathers.

2

A SON OF DAVID?

MATTHEW calls Jesus a "son of David" in the opening line of his gospel. In Luke the angel predicted to Mary that her son Jesus would "sit on the throne of *his father* David" (Luke 1:32).[1] The two concepts are intertwined. Not every descendant of David occupied David's throne, but no one occupied the throne who was not a descendant of David. King David, reputed author of many of the Psalms and father of King Solomon, was the most renowned of Israel's ancient kings. Shortly before David's death God promised him that his "throne" would last forever and that only those of his "seed" could occupy it as rulers over the nation of Israel (2 Samuel 7:12–16). The Hebrew prophets took up this promise and made it the basis for their prediction that in the "Last Days" the Christ or Messiah would sit on David's throne as an ideal ruler over Israel. He then, of necessity, had to have the right pedigree.

This promise was seen as an unbreakable covenant. In the book of Jeremiah God declares that if you can break the fixed order of the heavens "then I will reject the seed of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose *one of his seed* to rule over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Jeremiah 33:25–26). This promise to David, of royal descendants reigning over Israel, was likened to a fixed law of nature.

Others might rule the land of Israel, whether Greeks or Romans, but they were regarded as foreign and illegitimate occupiers whom God would rightfully remove when the true Messiah came. There was a brief period of Jewish independence from 165–63 B.C., just before the Romans took over the country. A native Jewish family known as the Maccabees or the Hashmoneans ruled the country, establishing a priestly dynasty, but were unable to claim Davidic lineage.[2] As we have noted, Herod the Great, despite his title "King of the Jews," feared that a true descendant of David's ancestry might arise and threaten his power.

So the obvious question is *how was* Jesus a "son of David"? What do we know of his lineage that might support this claim that he was a part of the royal family of David?

Luke and Matthew give Jesus no human father yet they give different genealogical accounts of his ancestry. Genealogies, or what many Bible readers remember as the lists of "begats," do not usually make gripping reading, but Jesus' genealogies are full of surprises.

JESUS' LEGAL LINEAGE AND AN ANCIENT CURSE

Matthew begins his book with this genealogy: "Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat Judah," and so forth. Since Matthew is the first book of the New Testament, more than a few eager Bible readers have had good intentions dampened by this technical beginning. But let's look again. Matthew lists forty male names, all the way from Abraham, who lived a thousand years before David, through David, and down to Joseph, husband of Mary.

Any standard Jewish genealogy at the time was based solely on the male lineage, which was of primary importance. One's father was the significant factor in the cultural world in which Jesus was born. Yet in Matthew we find four women mentioned, connected to four of the forty male names listed. This is completely irregular and unexpected. Matthew records:

Judah fathered Perez and Zerah *from Tamar* (v. 3)
Salmon fathered Boaz *from Rahab* (v. 5)
Boaz fathered Obed *from Ruth* (v. 5)
David fathered Solomon *from Uriah's wife* (v. 5)

These are all women's names, or in the case of Uriah's wife, an unnamed woman. But even more surprising, each of these four women was a foreigner who had a scandalous sexual reputation in the Old Testament.[3] The first, Tamar, a widow desperate for a child, purposely got pregnant by dressing up as a roadside prostitute and enticing her own father-in-law. Rahab was a tavern keeper or "prostitute." Ruth was a Moabite woman, which was bad enough since Israelites were forbidden to have anything to do with Moabites because of their reputation as sexual temptresses. But Ruth crawled into the bed of Boaz, her future husband, after getting him drunk one night, in order to get him to marry her. Uriah's wife—her name is not even given here for the disgrace of it all—was the infamous Bathsheba. She had an adulterous affair with King David and ended up pregnant, blending his fame with shame ever after. And yet, Matthew is otherwise giving us the revered royal lineage of King David himself! Something very important is going on here. The regular drumming pattern of a list of male names is jarred by mention of these women, each of whom was well known to Jewish readers. They don't belong in a formal genealogy of the royal family. The stories of these women in the Bible stand out because of their shocking sexual details. It is clear that Matthew is trying to put Jesus' own potentially scandalous birth into the context of his forefathers—and foremothers. He is preparing the reader for what is to come.

At the end of the list, the very last name in the very last line, the other shoe drops. Matthew surely intends to startle, catching the reader unawares. He writes:

> *Jacob fathered Joseph, the husband of Mary;*
> from her was fathered *Jesus called Christ.*

What one would expect in any standard male genealogy would be:

Jacob fathered Joseph,
Joseph fathered *Jesus, called the Christ.*

Matthew uses the verb "fathered" or "begot" (Greek *gennao*) thirty-nine times in the active voice with a masculine subject. But when he comes to Joseph he makes an important shift. He uses the same verb in the passive voice with a feminine object: *from her was fathered* Jesus. So a *fifth* woman unexpectedly slips into the list: Mary herself.

And yet this is definitely not Mary's bloodline. This is Joseph's genealogy. So why is she included? Matthew is setting the reader up for the story that immediately follows, in which Mary, an engaged woman, is pregnant by a man who is not her husband. It is as if he is silently cautioning any overly pious or judgmental readers not to jump to conclusions. In the most revered genealogy of that culture, the royal line of King David himself, there are stories of sexual immorality involving both men and women who were nonetheless honored in memory.

But there is yet another remarkable feature of this lineage of Joseph that is vital to the story and should not be missed. Joseph's branch of David's family, even though it had supplied all the ancient kings of Judah, had been put under a ban or curse by the prophet Jeremiah. In those last dark days just before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Jeremiah had made a shocking declaration about Jechoniah, the final reigning king of David's line: "Write this man down as stripped . . . for *none of his seed* shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling in Judah again" (Jeremiah 22:30).[4] Joseph was a direct descendant of this ill-reputed Jechoniah (Matthew 1:11–12).[5]

In effect, it was as if Jeremiah were declaring the covenant that God made with David null and void. At least it might appear that way. Psalm 89, written in the aftermath of these developments, laments: "You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust" (Psalm 89:39). Or so it seemed. After all, Jechoniah was the last Jewish king of the royal family of David to occupy the throne in the land of Israel. Joseph was of this same line, but as the *legal* father of Jesus,

rather than the *biological* father, Joseph's ancestry did not disqualify Jesus' potential claim to the throne if Jesus could claim descent from David through another branch of the Davidic lineage. But how many "branches" of the Davidic family were there?

A HIDDEN BRANCH OF THE ROYAL FAMILY

Luke's genealogy provides us with the missing key to understanding how Jesus could claim Davidic descent with no biological connection to his adoptive father Joseph. Luke records his genealogy of Jesus in his third chapter. Jesus was thirty years old and had just been baptized by John. Whereas Matthew begins with Abraham and follows the line down to Joseph, Jesus' adoptive father, Luke *begins* with Jesus and works backward—all the way back to Adam! Rather than forty names, as in Matthew, we have seventy-six. There are three striking features in this genealogy.

First, it begins with a surprising qualification. Literally translated it says: "And Jesus was about thirty years [old] when he began, being a son as was supposed of Joseph, of Heli" (Luke 3:23). The Greek is quite terse, but what jumps off the page is the phrase "as was supposed."[6] Luke is telling his readers two things: that Joseph was only the "supposed" or "legal" father of Jesus and that Jesus had a grandfather named Heli. According to Matthew, Joseph's father was named Jacob. So who was Heli? The most obvious solution is that he was Mary's father.[7] One seldom hears anything about the grandparents of Jesus, but Jesus had *two* grandfathers, one from Joseph and the other from Mary. Two grandfathers means two separate family trees. What we have in Luke 3:23–38 is the other side of Jesus' family, traced through his actual bloodline from his mother Mary. The reason Mary is not named is that Luke abides by convention and includes only males in his list. Since Luke acknowledges no biological father for Jesus he begins with Joseph as a "stand-in" but qualifies things with the phrase "as was supposed." A freely paraphrased translation would go like this: "And Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work, *supposedly* being a son of Joseph but *actually* being of the line of Heli." If Mary's parents were indeed named Joachim and Anna, as

early Christian tradition holds, it is possible that Heli is short for the name Eliakim, which in turn is a form of the traditional name Joachim.

It is unlikely that Luke simply concocted such a detailed record. Jewish families were quite zealous about genealogical records—all the more so if one was descended from the line of David. Josephus, the Jewish historian of that period, traces his own priestly genealogy with obvious pride and mentions archival records that he had consulted.[8] Julius Africanus, an early 3rd-century Jewish-Christian writer who lived in Palestine, reports that leading Jewish families kept private genealogical records, since Herod and his successors had sought to destroy those that were public. Africanus specifically notes the practice of keeping clandestine family genealogies as characteristic of Jesus' descendants.[9] Since the Davidic lineage of Jesus was so important to the early Christians it is likely that Luke had one of these records available to him.

Luke's genealogy also reveals another important bit of information. Mary, like her husband Joseph, was of the lineage of King David—but with a vital difference. Her connection to David was *not* through the cursed lineage running back through Jechoniah to David's son Solomon. Rather she could trace herself back through another of David's sons, namely Nathan, the brother of Solomon (Luke 3:31). Nathan, like Solomon, was a son of David's favored wife Bathsheba, but Nathan never occupied the throne and his genealogy accordingly became obscure. He is listed in the biblical record but no descendants are mentioned, in contrast to his brother Solomon (1 Chronicles 3:5–10). So, according to Luke, Jesus could claim a direct ancestry back to King David through his mother Mary as well. He did not have the "adoptive" claim through his legal father Joseph alone, but also that of David's actual bloodline.

THE TWO BRANCHES OF THE ROYAL FAMILY OF DAVID

The lineage on the left is provided by Matthew as the lineage of Joseph, Jesus' legal father. It is shorter and abbreviated after Jeconiah. The names in italics are those who reigned as kings of Israel and Judah. The lineage on the right is provided by Luke as the biological line of Jesus' mother Mary.

David

Solomon	Nathan
Rehoboam	Mattatha
Abijah	Menna
Asa	Melea
Jehoshaphat	Eliakim
Joram	Jonam
Uzziah	Joseph
Jotham	Judah
Ahaz	Simeon
Hezekiah	Levi
Manasseh	Matthat
Amon	Jorim
Josiah	Eliezer
Jechoniah	Joshua
	Er
	Elmadam
	Cosam
	Addi
	Melchi
	Neri
	Shealtiel
	Zerubbabel
	Rhesa
	Joanan
	Joda
	Josech

	Semein
	Mattathias
	Maath
Shealtiel	Naggai
Zerubbabel	Esli
Abiud	Nahum
Eliakim	Amos
Azor	Mattathias
Zadok	Joseph
Achim	Jannai
Eliud	Melchi
Eleazar	Levi
Matthan	Matthat
Jacob	Heli (Eliakim)
Joseph	Mary

The name Nazareth, the town where Mary lived, comes from the Hebrew word *netzer* meaning "branch" or "shoot."[10] One could loosely translate Nazareth as "Branch Town." But why would a town have such a strange name? As we have seen, in the time of Jesus it was a tiny village. Its claim to fame was not size or economic prominence but something potentially even more significant. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, written before Jesus' lifetime, we regularly find the future Messiah or King of Israel described as the "branch of David."[11] The term is taken from Isaiah 11, where the Messiah of David's lineage is called a "Branch." The term stuck. The later followers of Jesus were called Nazarenes or "Branchites."[12] The little village of Nazareth very likely got its name, or perhaps its nickname, because it was known as the place where members of the royal family had settled and were concentrated. It is no surprise that both Mary and Joseph lived there, as each represented different "branches" of the "Branch of David." The gospels mention other "relatives" of the family that lived there (Mark 6:4). It is entirely possible that most of the inhabitants of "Branch Town" were members of the same extended "Branch" family. The family's affinity for this area of Galilee continued for centuries. North of Sepphoris, about twelve miles from Nazareth, was a town called

Kokhaba or "Star Town." The term "Star," like "Branch" is a coded term for the Messiah that is also found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.[13] Both Nazareth and Kokhaba were noted well into the 2nd century A.D. as towns in which families related to Jesus, and thus part of the "royal family," were concentrated.[14]

Finally, the names in Luke that run from King David down to Heli, Mary's father, offer us some very interesting clues that further explain why this particular Davidic line was uniquely important. There are listed no fewer than six instances of the name we know as Matthew: Matthat (twice), Mattathias (twice), Maath, and Mattatha. What is striking is that the name Matthew was one invariably associated with a priestly, not a kingly or royal, lineage. One of Jesus' Twelve Apostles was named Matthew, but he was also called Levi.[15] Two of the six "Matthews" in Jesus' lineage were sons of fathers named "Levi." Josephus records that his own father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and brother were all named Matthias, and they were all priests of the tribe of Levi from the distinguished priestly family of the Hashmoneans or Maccabees. Ancient Israel was divided into twelve tribes, descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. The priests of Israel had to be descendants of Aaron, brother of Moses, who was from the tribe of Levi. The kings had to be of the royal lineage of King David, who was of the tribe of Judah. These positions, king and priest, gave the tribes of Judah and Levi special prominence. But why would there be so many priestly names in a Davidic dynasty?

Remember, when Mary became pregnant and left Nazareth to stay with Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptizer, Luke notes that they were *relatives*, though he does not say how (Luke 1:36). But he also records that Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah were of the priestly lineage (Luke 1:5). This is further confirmation of the link between Mary's Davidic family and the priestly tribe of Levi.

It is inconceivable that such a heavy prevalence of Levite or priestly names would be part of Mary's genealogy unless there was a significant influence from the tribe of Levi merging into this particular royal line of the tribe of Judah. What appears likely is that Mary was of mixed lineage. Luke only names the male line from David down to Mary. But the

large number of priestly names indicates that there were likely important Levite women marrying into this Davidic line along the way. It is a pattern that goes all the way back to Aaron, brother of Moses, the very first Israelite priest. Aaron of the tribe of Levi married a princess of the tribe of Judah named Elisheva or Elizabeth (Exodus 6:23).

What is all the more amazing is that this mixing of these two tribes in a single family was verified in the Talpiot tomb that I discussed in the Introduction. It contained five names common to the family of Jesus—two Marys, a Joseph, a Jesus, and a Jude—and also a *Matya* or Matthew. These were all in the same family tomb. The "Jude" who was buried there is surely of the tribe of Judah, and the Matthew is certainly of the tribe of Levi—yet they had lain side by side for two thousand years, waiting to tell us something important. Whether this is the Jesus family tomb or not, the combination of these names demonstrates that the genealogy of Luke, with its mixing of these two tribes, is historically plausible within a single Jewish family of the times.

When I was able to view these Talpiot ossuaries recently in the Israel Antiquities warehouse in Bet Shemesh, I was glad to see our Matya, or Matthew, shelved with the other members of his family around him, as if giving mute testimony to Luke's genealogy. I ran my gloved hand gently over the "Matthew" inscription and then over the others, trying somehow through touch to connect to the past that these names represent. But is there any special significance to such a mixed ancestry of Davidic and Levite lineage? The Dead Sea Scrolls provide us with the surprising answer.

ONE, TWO, OR THREE MESSIAHS: A NEW REVELATION

Christians and Jews subsequently have come to focus on *the* Messiah—a single figure of David's line who was to rule as King in the last days. And yet, in the Dead Sea Scrolls we encounter a devoutly religious community, usually identified with the Essenes, who expected the coming of three figures—a *prophet* like Moses and the *messiahs* of Aaron and of Israel.[16] The "Messiah of Israel" is clearly the Davidic king, but the

"Messiah of Aaron" refers to a priest figure—*also* called a messiah. This insight fills a gap in our understanding of the Jesus dynasty. Various texts begin to make more sense and fit together in a way that has been previously overlooked.

The English word "messiah" comes from the Hebrew word *moshiach*, which simply means "an anointed one." The equivalent Greek word, *christos*, also means "anointed" and from that we have derived our more familiar term "Christ," meaning Messiah. The word refers to a sacred ritual in which oil was poured on the head of a chosen individual to officially confirm him as either priest or king. A prophet typically carried out the installation on the one chosen by God. But in either case, whether priest or king, the candidate had to have the proper bloodline to qualify. Most people are surprised to learn that the very first Messiah in the Bible was Aaron. He was "anointed" as a priest by his brother Moses and is referred to in the Hebrew text as a "*moshiach*" or "messiah" (Exodus 40:12–15). This was hundreds of years before the prophet Samuel anointed David as king of Israel (1 Samuel 16:13). An anointed priest had to be a descendant of Aaron, and the anointed king had to be a descendant of David. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a direct descendant of King David but she also had bloodline ties to a Levite or priestly lineage descended from Aaron. This is evidenced both by her genealogy and her kinship with the family of Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptizer. In later centuries, after the biblical era, the father determined one's tribal affiliation, while the mother was seen as the guarantor of a child's "Jewishness." Things were not so settled in biblical times. Women in the Bible are spoken of as bearing "seed" and the same Hebrew word *zara'* (literally "seed") is used to refer to the offspring of either men or women.[17] Accordingly, Jesus could make claim to being from the "seed of David" through the lineage of his mother.[18] But what do we know about Jesus' father? If Joseph was only his adoptive father, then who might his biological father have been? For those who accept by faith the accounts of the "virgin birth" in Matthew and Luke the question is moot—*Jesus had no human father.* But is there any evidence in our records that might offer us a more historically based alternative?