

# OpenTheo

## November 18th: Isaiah 31 & Luke 3:23-38

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Do not go down to Egypt! The genealogy of Jesus Christ.

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## Transcript

Isaiah chapter 31. Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong! But do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or consult the Lord. And yet He is wise, and brings disaster.

He does not call back His words, but will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the helpers of those who work iniquity. The Egyptians are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the Lord stretches out His hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together.

For thus the Lord said to me, As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey, and when a band of shepherds is called out against him, he is not terrified by their shouting, or daunted at their noise. So the Lord of hosts will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill, like birds hovering. So the Lord of hosts will protect Jerusalem.

He will protect and deliver it. He will spare and rescue it. Turn to Him from whom people have deeply revolted, O children of Israel! For in that day everyone shall cast away his

idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you.

And the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of man, and a sword, not of man, shall devour him, and he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be put to forced labour. His rock shall pass away in terror, and his officers desert the standard in panic, declares the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem. Isaiah chapter 31 continues chapter 30's warnings against turning to Egypt for aid.

The Assyrians came against Judah in 701 BC, defeated 46 of their fortified cities, and besieged Jerusalem. In the crisis, the leaders of Judah turned their gaze to the south, to Egypt for aid. Israel's history with Egypt justified profound wariness of such an alliance.

A former alliance with Egypt during the reign of Solomon had ended badly, with Shishak of Egypt coming up against Jerusalem and plundering it in the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon's son, in addition to his harbouring fugitives such as Hadad the Edomite and Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who would later be thorns in the side of the house of David. During his reign, Solomon became the leading weapons trader in the region, exporting Egyptian horses and chariots to the kings of the Hittites and the Arameans. However, in forming a marriage alliance with Egypt, and in going to Egypt for horses, Solomon had broken key commandments given to the king in Deuteronomy.

In Deuteronomy chapter 17 verse 16, in one of the laws of the king, we read, Only he must not acquire many horses for himself, or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, You shall never return that way again. Horses and chariots were essential elements of any powerful ancient Near Eastern war machine, and Egypt was the best place to go to get them. Chariots, the tanks of their day, were one of the reasons why the Israelite tribes in the plains had struggled to dispossess the Canaanites in those regions of the land, who had iron chariots.

While much of Judah's terrain was not well suited for chariots, they were a prestige war machine, and a large force of chariots and horses projected an image of power. In the right conditions, they could be immensely powerful. When Assyria came up against Judah, Sennacherib had a great number of chariots.

When he marked Hezekiah and his forces at Jerusalem, the Rabshakeh had implied that even if the men of Judah were given many horses and chariots, they wouldn't have the competence to ride them. 2 Kings 18 verses 23 and 24. Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria.

I will give you two thousand horses if you are able on your part to set riders on them. How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master's servants, when you trust in Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? This chapter opens with another woe statement, building upon the message of the preceding chapter. Many in Judah had

put their hope in military might and weaponry to save them.

If only, they reasoned, we had the latest chariots and the finest horses, we would be able to resist the Assyrians. However, the Lord, who was supposed to be their God and their King, was utterly disregarded in their considerations. They put more store in technology and human might than they did in the creator of the universe.

Trusting in their own shrewdness and real politic, they were unmindful of the wisdom of the Lord and of the certainty of his word and counsel, and yet he would bring disaster upon them and their machinations would not be able to withstand his plans. The Lord's purposes cannot be thwarted or frustrated. He acts with sure power and in accordance with his holiness against all evil.

Much as in his message concerning the ultimately frail humanity behind the terrifying Syro-Ephraimite alliance in chapter 7, the Lord seeks to demythologise the might of Egypt. While Egypt was likely perceived as an immense and near irresistible power by many of Isaiah's contemporaries, the Lord contrasts them with him and their power with his power. The contrast is nothing less than that between man and God, between the frailty of the flesh and the immense power of the spirit.

If Judah relied upon Egypt for its deliverance, it would find that Egypt would not be able to bear its weight. When the Lord stretched out his hand in judgement, Egypt would fail, as would Judah, with a devastating outcome for both. What is the alternative to looking to Egypt for aid? From verse 4 to the end of the short chapter, the Lord describes the help that he can provide to his people.

He compares himself to a lion that has taken a lamb. Even were a whole band of shepherds to come against him, they could not scare him off, nor could they separate him from his prey. When the Lord comes to fight at Mount Zion, he will display the same persistence and ferocity in the face of all of their foes, protecting Zion from their clutches.

The second comparison is to hovering birds, presumably over their nests and young when a predator comes near. Besides the fearless persistence of the lion, the Lord will lovingly shield his people as the mother bird might protect her chicks. Similar imagery is used in the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 verses 9-12.

But the Lord's portion is his people. Jacob is a lot of heritage. He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness, he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions.

The Lord alone guided him. No foreign god was with him. In such a manner the Lord would deliver his people.

The prophet exhorts the people to turn back to the Lord, repenting of their iniquity. In verse 22 of the preceding chapter, Isaiah had declared, Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver, and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things.

You will say to them, Be gone. In verse 7 the people's casting away of their idols is again described. As the Lord defends and redeems his people, the futility, impotence and wickedness of idols will become apparent to the people, and they will entirely reject them.

The Lord himself, not human power, would strike the Assyrians, causing them to flee. We might see the fulfilment of this in chapter 37 verses 36-37. And the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians.

And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and returned home, and lived at Nineveh. The Lord was described as the Rock of Israel in verse 29 of the preceding chapter.

Assyria has its own rock, perhaps in Sennacherib, perhaps in a mighty city, or perhaps in a false god. However their rock would pass away, while the Rock of Israel would stand unmoved. Again in the preceding chapter, Isaiah had spoken of a thousand men of Judah fleeing before one, on account of the people's sin.

This possibly looked back to Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 30 in the Song of Moses. However the verse that follows that contrasts the Lord's people's source of strength with that of their enemies. For their rock is not as our rock, our enemies are by themselves.

The chapter concludes by speaking of the Lord's bond with Jerusalem, but in terms of his fire that burns there. We might think back here to the description of Jerusalem as ariel, or altar at the beginning of chapter 29. The fire and furnace of the Lord makes us think of the altar, and also of the consuming holiness of the Lord that would destroy all that would violate the place of his dwelling.

A question to consider. Verse 3 contrasts flesh and spirit. Where else in the Old Testament might we get a sense of what this contrast involves? Luke chapter 3 verses 23-38 Jesus when he began his ministry was about thirty years of age, being the son, as was supposed, of Joseph the son of Heli, the son of Mathat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jani, the son of Joseph, the son of Matathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Nagai, the son of Meath, the son of Matathias, the son of Simeon, the son of Joseph, the son of Jodah, the son of Joannan, the son of Risa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Kosam, the son of Elmaedim, the son of Ur, the son of Joshua, the son of Eleazar, the son of Joram, the son of Mathat, the son of Levi, the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, the son of Meliah, the

son of Menah, the son of Matathah, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salah, the son of Nashon, the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Ani, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Sirad, the son of Rehu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalil, the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

Luke chapter 3 after the baptism of Jesus ends with a genealogy and it describes Jesus entering into his ministry at the age of 30 years old. This is the same age that the priests would have begun their ministry. It's the same age as Joseph begins to serve Pharaoh, that David becomes king and Ezekiel in the 30th year sees the heavens opened and sees visions of God.

So in all of these cases we're seeing an entrance into some sort of ministry, whether it's prophetic ministry in the case of Ezekiel, whether it's kingly ministry in the case of David, whether it's the ministry of stewardship in the case of Joseph or the ministry of the priests in the temple. There's a different setting of the genealogy here than we find in Matthew. In Matthew it comes at the very beginning of the book in chapter 1 and it's set out in 42 generations divided into three sets of 14 and particularly emphasising David and Abraham.

This doesn't introduce the gospel but rather it occurs after the baptism and before the temptation. However it does frame this as a sort of beginning of sorts. It's the beginning of Jesus' ministry and it lies between two key events.

The father's statement of Jesus' sonship leads into this. Now this genealogy is also interesting in other ways. It moves backwards rather than forwards.

Most of the genealogies that we have in scripture start off with the oldest figure and then move forward to more recent times. This starts off with Christ and then moves backwards and it goes back to the very beginning, to Abraham as the son of God. There's a cosmic scope that opens up here.

Genealogies serve a number of different purposes. One of the things that they do is to gather large periods of time together and large stories are condensed within a genealogy. We have a sense of the different figures who are involved and the legacy that a person might be bearing in what they're doing.

Typically the further you go back in a genealogy the more it becomes a matter of diminishing returns. If we go back far enough just about anyone can be seen as a descendant from some great ancestor because their genealogy has spread so wide and

has been so mixed in with other peoples. Which of us is not descended from Adam or from Noah? While this is the case however, Jesus in the beginning of his ministry is related to these figures in a different way.

He holds their destiny within himself. Jesus takes the destiny of the whole human race and he's going to live it out and bring it to his head. So it's not just that he has the blood of Adam in him.

All of us are descended from Adam. No, it's the fact that Jesus will achieve for the human race what Adam once lost and failed to achieve. When we look at this genealogy and compare it with Matthew there are a number of problems though.

It seems as if very few names are shared in common, certainly once we get past David. Even the numbers of names are very different. Matthew structures his genealogy according to 314s whereas Luke is a genealogy of 77.

Some have suggested that Matthew's is the genealogy of Joseph whereas the genealogy in Luke is that of Mary. But in both cases it's Joseph that is connected with the genealogy of David in particular and there's no reason to believe that Mary was descended from David. For the numbers of the names we should not worry that much about that.

The genealogies are not necessarily comprehensive. They don't necessarily include every single figure. Luke's could be a lot more extensive than Matthew's in this regard.

Other suggestions include the possibility that one is a sort of royal line and the other is a father-son line of genealogy. If for instance you were to trace the kings of the United Kingdom and go all the way back and trace the genealogy you would get a different list from the list of those who sat on the throne in order and Matthew seems to follow this line of royal succession whereas Luke departs from it quite radically. So maybe that's part of what's going on.

Both Matthew and seem to have some structuring device for their genealogy. Matthew's is very apparent. It has the three sets of fourteen and it's divided according to key events and key characters.

Abraham, David, the descent into Babylon and Luke's does not have quite so clear a pattern. But yet it is 77 names and these can be broken into 11 lists of seven names and there are key names at specific points. David starts the seventh list of seven names.

Abraham starts the ninth. Enoch the eleventh. Perhaps with the focus upon the number seven we're supposed to hear jubilee themes.

Seven, seven times seven, 70 or 70 times seven or maybe in this case 77 are all numbers that have that sort of resonance and perhaps that's part of what Luke is trying to do here to frame what Jesus is doing as a jubilee type event. It's also interesting that it

goes back. While this is a feature found in common with other genealogies at the time, most of the genealogies of scripture move forward from father to son all the way down rather than from son to father.

That movement from son to father is most common when we see someone's pedigree set out. That they are someone who has title to a particular office or role. Perhaps seeing as this comes at the beginning of Jesus' ministry we're supposed to see it in this light.

However although it is important for Luke and elsewhere in the gospels that Jesus is traced through David, that he belongs to the Davidic line, he comes through Nathan which is surprising. In Matthew it's Solomon. In seeking clues to try and understand the reason for this some have observed Zechariah chapter 12 and seen there the possibility of Nathan's line being set apart from the rest of the house of David.

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and please for mercy so that when they look on me on him whom they have pierced they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only son and weep bitterly over him as one weeps over a firstborn. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad Rimmon in the plains of Megiddo. The land shall mourn each family by itself, the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves.

The family of the house of Nathan by itself and their wives by themselves. The family of the house of Levi by itself and their wives by themselves. The family of the Shimeonites by itself and their wives by themselves, and all the families that are left each by itself and their wives by themselves.

Perhaps there is a particular significance to the line of Nathan, but if there is I don't have an idea what it could be. A further interesting detail is the absence of the name of Jeconiah or Jehoiachin from Luke as the father of Sheol Teal, whereas he is present in the Gospel of Matthew. Luke mentions a different father for Sheol Teal.

Now this might be in part related to Jeremiah 22.30 where there is a curse upon Jeconiah. Thus says the Lord, write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah. Yet we do hear that in 1 Chronicles 3.16-17 he did have a son.

The descendants of Jehoiachin, Jeconiah his son, Zedekiah his son, and the sons of Jeconiah the captive, Sheol Teal his son. Now Sheol Teal may have been adopted and the differences between the two genealogies may be explained this way. One way or another these genealogies are complex and we have to resort to some difficult explanation to reconcile them.

We have to think in terms of levirate marriage or in terms of adoption or in terms of a royal line and a natural biological line or in terms of Mary's line and Joseph's line. There are many different options of various merits. Jesus' genealogy and ancestry are complex, containing many stories that have not been told to us.

This of course is true of most people's genealogies. The important thing is that the Son of God has taken his stand in history. He has come in the middle of history.

He's the one who takes the human race and its story upon himself and he stands as part of a line of promise, running from Abraham through the patriarchs to David and down through the history of Israel and being fulfilled at that moment in history. The Christmas Carol talks about the hopes and fears of all the years being met in Bethlehem that night and one of the things that the genealogy of Luke is doing is showing us that the hopes and fears of all the years are met in the figure of Jesus Christ. That at this juncture in history, this weight is coming upon his shoulders just as he's about to go out and start his ministry.

He is the one who's bearing the weight of the world. The entire fate of humanity has come down to him. He is parallel in this respect to Adam.

This will help us to see in the account of the temptation of Christ a contrast with the temptation of Adam which he failed in the garden. Jesus succeeds in the wilderness. The genealogy ends with the words the Son of God.

Adam was the one who had God as his father. In a particular way God formed him out of the dust of the earth. But Christ in the events immediately preceding this has been declared to be the Son of God by the Father's voice speaking from heaven, you are my beloved Son.

And in what follows Jesus is being tested concerning his Sonship by Satan in the wilderness. So the theme of divine Sonship is another crucial part of Luke's genealogy and why he has it in this way and in this place. A question to consider, thinking about the genealogies of the Old and New Testament, can you think of some of the various purposes that they are performing in their different locations?