



Jesus: Who Do You Think You Are?

3. David and Solomon

Jim Crampsey SJ

Our Advent journey through the genealogy of Jesus continues with a focus on David and Solomon. It is after the inclusion of David that the genealogies given by Matthew and Luke take different paths. Jim Crampsey SJ imagines a Jesus familiar only with the genealogy in Luke's Gospel being confronted in an episode of the television show *Who Do You Think You Are?* with the possibility that his ancestry might not be as it seems...

What you need to know

This article works with two sets of documents. The first set (with which we presume Jesus to be familiar) is the genealogy of Jesus as it is given in Luke 3, and the book of Chronicles, a priestly document of the post-exilic period which gives a patchwork version of the lives of the Kings of Israel. Luke's genealogy moves backwards to Adam, the Son of God, which fits with that evangelist's universalism. It is placed curiously between the stories of Jesus's baptism and his temptations in the desert, in both of which the title 'Son of God' is important. (The idea developed below, that Zechariah drew up the genealogy in Luke and gave it to Mary, is completely invented. It is a shot at the provenance of the genealogy based on Luke's traditional connection with Our Lady.)

The second set of documents comprises Matthew's genealogy, which starts with Abraham (appropriate for a Jewish-Christian gospel) and moves forwards; and a different account of the succession of the kings of Israel: the warts-and-all account of David and Solomon in Samuel and 1 Kings, which forms part of what scholars see as a history tied to the book of Deuteronomy, with material dating from both pre-exilic and post-exilic periods.

Presenter: *Some people might be surprised to see Jesus of Nazareth as our guest tonight on Who Do You Think You Are? He doesn't seem to set much store by the family. Somebody once asked if they could follow him after they had buried their father – and in our culture burials are quick – yet Jesus still said, 'Leave the dead to bury their dead.' And he has also been known to keep his own family members at a distance, even when they visit the places where he teaches. It is difficult to see how all of that squares with an interest in his genealogy, so Jesus, why have you chosen to explore your ancestry?*

Jesus: What you say about my approach to family life is true. My view is that family obligations have their oppressive side, and life in the Kingdom needs to be free from those pressures. But we can also learn from the intensity of family relationships, that at their best



they are the model for all of our relationships in the Kingdom. Imagine a family that doesn't consider itself *exclusive* by blood, but *inclusive* by our shared humanity.

My interest in genealogy is growing as my sense of self develops. I've found myself asking my friends things like, 'Who do people say I am?' or 'Who do you say that I am?' Until now, the answers have connected me with prophets –

Elijah or Jeremiah, for instance – but more recently there have been some suggestions of royal connections, maybe because I keep talking about the Kingdom of God.

Presenter: *Well let's start with what we know. Aren't you related to the late John the Baptist, whom people certainly held to be a prophet, despite his fate?*

Jesus: Yes I am, and my baptism by John really helped me gain a sense of myself. In fact, it was John's father, Zechariah, who first hinted at some royal connection. He was a levitical priest and he had a copy of the priestly history of the Kings of Israel, called *The Words of the Days* [Chronicles] – I have a vague memory that he did my genealogy¹ and gave it to my mother. Priests seem to have a special interest in genealogies; you only have to unroll a Torah scroll to find a genealogy! Anyway, he thought I am related to King David through Nathan.

Presenter: *This Nathan that you mention – wasn't he the prophet who confronted David over his taking of Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? How could you be related to both of them?!*

Jesus: No, the Nathan I'm talking about is one of the sons of David and Bathsheba. I know that their first surviving son, Solomon, has all the glory, but apparently I'm a descendant of his brother, Nathan, about whom we know nothing. There's nothing in Zechariah's genealogy about the story you mention of Bathsheba, Uriah and David.

Presenter: *Well, it may surprise you to know that there is another version of your lineage, one that says you are descended from David through Solomon, not Nathan. Your ancestors, according to this version, feature heavily in the scrolls of the prophet Samuel and Kings. Why don't you take a look at these books to see what you can find out about Solomon and David?*

Jesus: I had no idea about some of this. There are all these stories about Saul and David,² and that great one about the giant Goliath!³ David was a good shepherd, wrestling with a bear and a lion to protect the sheep.⁴ He had about five wives and loads of children, although the only ones we are told about in any detail are those ambitioning for the throne, and one by one they disappear – the Absalom story is particularly tragic⁵ – to leave the field clear for Solomon. The whole story of David's desire for Bathsheba is hard to read, but the confrontation between David and Nathan the prophet is a brilliant way of leading someone from self-deceit into self-knowledge. What is hidden will come into the light.⁶

And there are some fascinating stories about Solomon, and one in particular that I like, about two women, because it illustrates God's gift of wisdom to

Solomon.⁷ I like that the women who came to him for justice were prostitutes; I can identify with that. And also, if I thought David had a lot of wives, what about Solomon?! According to the stories I knew, there were only two women in Solomon's life (apart from his mother Bathsheba), and here there are nearly one thousand! And it is because Solomon is persuaded by them to worship their gods that the tragedy of the division of the kingdom happens, according to the book of Kings.⁸

Presenter: *Who are the two special women in Solomon's life that merit a mention in the scroll that you have read?*

Jesus: Pharaoh's daughter and the Queen of Sheba. Don't you find it interesting that neither is named? Pharaoh's daughter has a house built for her, but not on the Temple Mount: she stays.⁹ The Queen of Sheba shows her wisdom - she goes.¹⁰

These scrolls of Samuel and Kings paint a different picture of these royal figures to the one I am more familiar with. I had always thought that David was a bit of a goody-goody, as was Solomon. But now David emerges as a complex person of flesh and blood – sometimes his flesh meant other people's blood! Solomon seems a bit of an odd character, only coming alive in the judgement between the two women; you don't get any sense that this is the author of the Song of Songs. Despite his gift of wisdom, he doesn't seem that bright in practice! Sure, Israel is a buffer state but how many alliances of marriage do you need? I find it difficult to empathise with Solomon, but I do feel for David.

Presenter: *Why so? Is there once incident in particular that you are thinking of?*

Jesus: Well, when Absalom rebels, David has to flee the city which he captured and made his capital. Abandoned by everyone, he is making the ascent up the Mount of Olives, weeping, barefoot and with his head covered. It is only when he gets to the top of the Mount of Olives that people from his past appear out of the blue to help him – there is something about that touches me deeply.¹¹

I'm so pleased to have read these stories about my ancestors – they have given me a richer appreciation of my place in a royal lineage, and a better understanding of two men whom I scarcely knew about before.

Presenter: *Well, Jesus has certainly uncovered some surprises in his family tree tonight... and there are plenty more where they came from! There are some startling figures in Jesus's ancestral line, including a Moabite, a prostitute and some very unskilled parents! You can find out more about [Ruth and Rahab](#), and about [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob](#).*

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¹ Luke 3:23-38

² 1 Samuel 18-24

³ 1 Samuel 17

⁴ 1 Samuel 17: 34-36

⁵ 2 Samuel 13-18

⁶ 2 Samuel 11-12

⁷ 1 Kings 3: 16-28

⁸ 1 Kings 11:4

⁹ 2 Chronicles 8:11

¹⁰ 2 Chronicles 12: 1-9

¹¹ 2 Samuel 15:30-16:14