Luke's introduction looks like good Greek history. John's reminds us of Jewish Wisdom Literature. Matthew's resembles a Jewish legal/religious document. Furthermore, the Hebrew OT begins and ends with a record of genealogies. The Hebrew OT ended with 1&2 Chronicles. Genesis uses the title "These are the generations of…" as a major divider of the book (Gen 6:9; 10:1;11:10,27;25:12,19;36:1,9;37:2). Matthew also starts with "A record of the genealogy." It also seems significant that the word "birth" (lit.genesis) is used in verse 18 just after the genealogical record. Thus, this word brackets Matthew's introduction.

Genealogies had three essential functions: (1) To show the character of a particular line. In other words, a man's descendants supposedly acted like him. Such is the case when Seth's line is contrasted to Cain's (Gen 4:25). (2) To demonstrate God's working in history with a particular people. This helped establish a corporate identity. And (3) to prove biological succession.

This third purpose was important for legal and political transactions:
(1) Property was distributed based on family affiliation.
(2) The Aaronic priesthood demanded biological affiliation. In fact, in Ezra's day, priests who could not prove their ancestry were considered unclean (Neh 7:61-64). This was of critical importance after the Babylonian captivity and the prevalence of intermarriage (Ezra 2:59-63;10:9-44;Neh 13:23-28).
(3) Genealogies were a way of keeping the lines "clean" (Deuteronomy 7:1-4; 23:1-8). This was especially important after the days of Hellenization.
(4) Jewish military arrangement was by tribes (Num 1:2-4), even when they were camping in the wilderness (Num 2:2,17;10:1-28).
(5) Taxes and offerings in the temple were made according to genealogical lines (Num 7:11-89).
(6) The Davidic kingdom of Judah always relied on direct succession. This became even more important when it was connected to Messianic fulfillment (Isa 11:1-5).

Matthew arranges his genealogy into three sets of 14 names (v.17), each representing a major period of Israel's history: Abraham, David, Exile. Matthew intends to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of all Jewish history. The problem is that the second set of names only includes 13 generations. Did Matthew miscount? The likelihood of a professional tax collector miscounting a genealogy is not great. What further confounds the issue is Matthew omits four names in v. 9 (Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah, and Jehoiakim) which are found in 1 Chronicles genealogy. In other words, Matthew could have listed 14/17/14 names but drops four of them resulting in 14/13/14.

Now, one must realize that the Jews were not interested in "complete" lists (this is primarily a Western expectation). They were interested in establishing the fact of descent. Persons were often omitted from a genealogy who were seen as insignificant or unflattering to the family. Furthermore, the words "Father," "Son," and "Beget" can be used to establish a relationship between a man and his grandfather/grandson or even further down the biological line. These words simply connect two people within a family, they do not always state scientifically their biological relationship. Thus, even a few names are left out of the genealogy, we can still speak accurately of a great-grandfather "begetting" a descendant.

Some have suggested these omissions were a result of scribal error. The first three names are from 1 Chronicles 3:11-12. It is possible that the scribes eye would pass from Ahaziah straight to Azariah, thereby leaving out three persons. Also, the omission of Jehoiachin (1 Chron 3:16). The bottom line is that Matthew is accused of making a clerical error.

A more likely explanation, however, is that Matthew purposely arranges the genealogy into 3 divisions of fourteen generations each. In other words, he purposely leaves out four kings in order to retain his structural arrangement. The question is, "Why would Matthew want fourteen names in each list and why would he only list 13 names in the central section?" The answer to both questions is David.

We notice in verse 1 that Matthew purposefully places David before Abraham, abandoning the chronological order of the rest of the genealogy. Why does he place David first? For emphasis. In fact, David's prominence in verse one is a key to the whole book. Matthews unique emphasis is that Jesus is the kin of the Jews, the promised progenitor of David. With this understanding we move now to verse 6 and give David a "double portion." In other words, by counting David twice, our list suddenly becomes 14/14/14. What is more striking is that the letter of David's name have a numeric value in Hebrew of 14. While this type of "numeric interpretation" (gematria) is quite foreign to us, it was a common rabbinic method of interpretation. The Hebrew language uses its alphabet as its numbering system as well. Therefore, children would learn arithmetic with the letters of their names, making this kind of "numerology" more common and more easily recognized. Matthew, like Luke and John, introduces his book with a style marvelously appropriate to his audience.

Another striking feature of Matthew's genealogy is his inclusion of women. It was pretty uncommon to include women in genealogies, but not unheard of (cf. 1 Chron 1:32; 2:17-21,24,26). However, you would expect them to be exemplary.

The inclusion of these particular women is simply scandalous. Tamar was guilty of prostitution and incest (Gen 38:6-30. Rahab was apparently a foreign harlot (Josh 2:1,3; 6:17,23,25; Heb 11:31). Ruth was a foreigner. And Bathsheba was an adulteress (2 Sam 12:24) and perhaps considered a foreigner by her marriage to a Hittite.

These ladies according to our standards do not belong in the lineage of the Messiah. Yet, there they are, as a neon reminder of the grace of God. When Mary was accused of being raped (or worse) and ostracized by her family and friends, each of these women could have stood next to her and said, "Honey, I know how you feel."

At the same time, Matthew describes Mary differently than the others. All five women give birth to a son in the lineage of David. The first four use an identical linguistic structure-"Out of". With Mary, however, the structure changes to "Out of whom was begotten". It would appear that Matthew is making a subtle statement about the virgin birth of Jesus.

Before moving on to Luke's genealogy, there is a curious theological thorn we must deal with. In 2 Sam 7:12-17, God promises David that through Solomon's line there would always be a descendant to sit on his throne. However, Jeremiah 22:30 says, "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah." How is it that God can keep both promises?

Since Jesus was the adopted son of Joseph, he becomes legal heir to Joseph's lineage. At the same time Matthew makes it clear he was not Joseph's physical, not only in 18-25, but even in v. 16. Thirty-nine times in vv. 2-16, Matthew uses a verb in the original language meaning "He became father the father of." Then suddenly in v.16, he breaks the pattern when he comes to Joseph who is only said to be the husband of Mary. Also, the words "of whom," which are ambiguous in English, are feminine in Greek, Matthew subtly, but clearly states that Jesus was the adopted son of Joseph (and legal heir to the throne of David), and the natural son of Mary. Thus, both 2 Samuel 7:12-17 and Jeremiah 22:30 are fulfilled.

There are three main differences between Matthew's genealogy and Luke's. (A)Matthew begins with Abraham and moves forward toward Jesus whereas Luke begins with Jesus and moves backward all the way to Adam. (B)If Luke's list is inverted and placed beside Matthew's list, the portion between Abraham and David is virtually identical. However, between David and Joseph,

the two are obviously two distinct lists. The only names which appear in both lists in the same order are Shealtiel and Zerubbabel (Mt 1:12; Lk 3:27).
(C)Luke's list contains forty progenitors between David and Christ; Matthew's only has twenty-six.

How can we account for these differences? It appears that we have two distinct lists. So, who do they belong to? There have been a number of different theories suggested. The first theory was proposed by Julius Africanus (d. A.D.240). He suggested that Matthew gives the genealogy of Josephs biological father whereas Luke gives the genealogy of Joseph's legal father. According to the laws of Levirate marriage, if a man died childless, it was his brothers responsibility to foster a child for him. In such a case, the dead man would still be the legal father for the purpose of inheritance, and the live man the biological father. This theory is based on the assumption that Joseph's legal father died childless. Although is it a distinct possibility, there is nothing in the text to suggest that this was the case.

A second theory, advocated first by J. Gresham Machen in the Virgin Birth of Christ, states that Matthew gives the legal descent of Joseph, whereas Luke gives the physical descent. The difference is, Matthew's account traces the legal heir to the Davidic throne, which would have come down to Joseph. In such and account, because the line failed at Jeconiah (Jer 22:30), it "skipped a beat" biologically and passed over to the next legal heir to the throne (Shealtiel, Mt 1:12; cf. Lk 3:27). Therefore, Matthew "changes tracks" from the biological line to the collateral line. If this is the case, Matthew asks the question, "Who is the heir of David?" whereas Luke asks, "Who is Joseph's father?" This view is based on the assumption that Matthew's account jumps to the collateral line. Again, this is certainly possible, but nothing in the text would necessitate or even suggest such.

A third theory suggests that Luke's record does not belong to Joseph at all but, in fact, lists Mary's family. Assuming that there was no male heir and that she was the oldest child, she would become the heiress (Num 27:1-11;36:1-12). If this were the case, when she married Joseph, he, in practicality, would become the heir to this line as well. Hence, Joseph is listed in place of Mary in Luke's account.

A fourth theory, like the third, suggests that Mary's line is given in Luke. Joseph, however, is not a part of the genealogy but merely a parenthetical comment of Luke 3:23, which should read, "Jesus…being the son (as was supposed of Joseph) of Heli…" The Greek would allow such a punctuation and even suggests it from the fact that of all the names in this list, Joseph alone lacks an article. In addition, "Son" could certainly apply to Heli as Jesus' grandfather. Furthermore, Luke likely

omits Mary's name since women were seldom included in genealogical lists. Although Matthew included four women in his list, Luke has no women in his.

This last theory would allow Mathew's genealogy to speak of biological, rather than legal or collateral descent. Thus, Matthew's use of the word "begat" would retain its normal usage rather than figurative. Besides, Matthew's interest in Jesus' relationship with the OT would be more strongly supported if his genealogy was Joseph's real descent (as well as legal descent), giving Jesus legal claim to the Davidic throne. Luke's genealogy of Jesus through a biological parent would fit his emphasis.

Beyond these sticky issues, there are a number of valuable lessons to be learned from the genealogical records. First, God is interested in people. He loves us, account us, and expects us to live in obedience to him. Second, God can use unknown and fallen people to accomplish his purposes. God's plan and means are greater than our fallible efforts. Third, God is sovereign. His designs will be accomplished. He ordains and directs history through human participants. Fourth, these two genealogies give us a glimpse of Jesus' identity. Humanly, he was Mary's son; legally, he was Joseph's son; fundamentally, is the son of God.