

THE ZERUBBABEL PROBLEM

Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

Excerpt from Apples of Gold

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” Proverbs 25:11

In the first year of Cyrus King of the Medes and Persians, Zerubbabel was a prince of Judah living in Babylon during the 70 year Captivity. He had been given the Chaldean name “Sheshbazzar” and in 536 BC was made governor by Cyrus and entrusted to lead c.50,000 of the captive Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple which had been razed by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 1:1-8, 2:2, 3:8-10, 5:1-2 & 13-17; cp. Zec. 4:9; Haggai 1:1).

Now a problem or, as some would have it, Bible error is perceived to exist between 1 Chr. 3:19 and other passages as to Zerubbabel’s parentage. His lineage begins with David at 3:1, and we jump from there to verses 15 through 19. Here we find listed King Josiah of Judah followed by some of his immediate descendants:

1 Chr. 3:15 the sons of Josiah were, the firstborn Johanan, the second Jehoiakim, the third Zedekiah, the fourth Shallum.

16 And the sons of Jehoiakim: Jeconiah his son, Zedekiah his son.

17 And the sons of Jeconiah; Assir,¹ Salathiel his son,

18 Malchiram also, and Pedaiiah, and Shenazar, Jecamiah, Hoshama, and Nedabiah.

19 And the sons of Pedaiiah were, Zerubbabel (spelled Zorobabel in the New Testament), and Shimei: and the sons of Zerubbabel; Meshullam, and Hananiah, and Shelomith their sister:

These reveal that Pedaiiah and Salathiel (spelled Shealtiel in Ezra, Nehemiah & Haggai) are brothers, for both have Jeconiah as a father. Further, a discrepancy is apparent when we compare the above to Mat. 1:12-13:

Mat. 1:11 And Josiah begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon:

12 And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel (i.e., Zerubbabel);

13 And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor;

The First Chronicles passage has Pedaiiah as the father of Zerubbabel, but Matthew gives Shealtiel as Zerubbabel’s parent. So, is this not an indisputable error in Scripture? No it is not. Having access to 34 Bible dictionaries &/or commentaries, we are dismayed to find that none have correctly resolved the matter. Most cite the renowned German scholar C.F. Keil (Commentary 3, 1 Chr. 3:19, pp. 81-82):

“Shealtiel died without any male descendants, leaving his wife a widow...After Shealtiel’s death his second brother, Pedaiiah, fulfilled the Levirate duty (see: Deu. 25:5-10, FNJ), and begat, in his marriage with his sister-in-law, Zerubbabel, who was now regarded in all that related to laws of heritage, as Shealtiel’s son”

¹ Some translate Assir (Hebrew = אָסִיר) as “the captive” or “the prisoner” so that 3:17 reads “Jeconiah, the prisoner” or “the captive”. However, there is no definite article (i.e., “the”) in the Hebrew text or in the Hebrew text used by the LXX.

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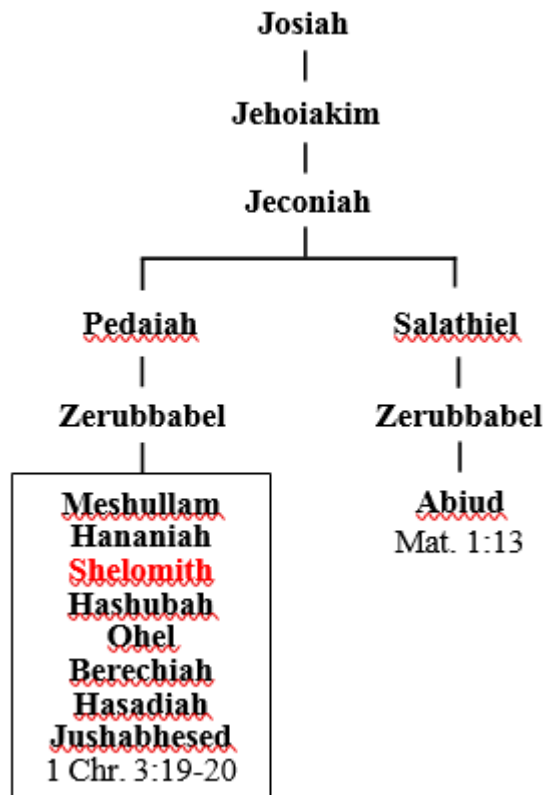
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However, this does not really resolve the issue for Deu. 25:6 commands that the firstborn son in such a marriage would be named after the deceased brother, Shealtiel – not Zerubbabel! The straightforward, simple answer to this apparent biblical error begins by observing Zerubbabel the son of Pedaiiah’s offspring which are listed in 1 Chron. 3:19-20 and shown on Josiah’s genealogical diagram (left side box, sons in black: Shelomith in red is a daughter). When we now look one verse farther down in Matthew (1:13) we discover that the Zerubbabel there had a son named Abiud, but there is no “Abiud” given among the sons of the Zerubbabel in 1 Chronicles 3:19-20!

Thus, it must be seen that the passages in 1 Chronicles 3 and Matthew 1 are telling us that both Jeconiah’s sons, Pedaiiah and Shealtiel (Salathiel), named a son “Zerubbabel”.² Two different men are before us with the same name. And this is why Ezra 3:2 & 8, 5:2; Nehemiah 12:1 and Haggai 1:1, 1:12 & 14, and 2:2 & 23 always read “Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel”. It is so done to differentiate as to which Zerubbabel is intended: is it the son of Pedaiiah or that of Shealtiel? The “problem” has been solved. All ever needed was to read one verse farther down in 1 Chronicles 3 and Matthew 1 – and then compare.



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² Some confuse the Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel at Luke 3:27 with Matthew 1:13, but they are not the same men. First, in Luke the father of Salathiel is a “Neri”, not Jeconiah. Moreover, the Zerubbabel in Matthew is a “prince of Judah” and in the kingly lineage of David through his and Bathsheba’s son Solomon on down to Joseph, husband of Mary (thus with Israel under Rome’s boot, Joseph was her uncrowned king; hence, had to die before Jesus could offer himself as king). But Luke’s genealogy is through their other son, Nathan (3:31). The lineages are completely different: therefore so are the Zerubbabels. Nathan’s kin Neri simply had a Salathiel who then named a son Zerubbabel after a renowned kinsman in Solomon’s ancestry.