

Genealogies – Showing Connection

When we are digging into Scripture, we need to consider, where we can, what we know of the genres, practices and cultures involved. As Christians, we also want to be putting our “Jesus glasses” on when reading the New Testament – or to put it more technically: we read the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament.

Ancient historical accounts are not modern historical works, nor are the videos of the events. So how does this apply to genealogies? We are familiar with our European family trees, and think that this then is how the writers in the Bible also thought.

Let’s start by having a look at the Genealogy of Jesus from Matthew 1:1-17. From v17, we see the emphasis on groups of 14 generations (from Abraham to David, David to Exile, Exile to Jesus). Given that the name David is mentioned 3 times in this passage, and that the Hebrew word for David has a numerical value of 14 – it is not a big stretch to argue that Matthew is using this genealogy to show Jesus’ connection to King David.

When we compare Matthew to Kings & Chronicles, we see that Matthew leaves out 3 names here:

Matthew 1:8 – Jehoshaphat to Jehoram to Uzziah (Azariah)

1 Chronicle 3:10-12 – Jehoshaphat to Jehoram to **Ahaziah to Joash to Amaziah** to Uzziah (Azariah)

And 1 name here:

Matthew 1:11 – Josiah to Jeconiah (Jehoiachin)

1 Chronicle 3:15-16 – Josiah to **Jehoiakim** to Jeconiah (Jehoiachin)

We have no records to compare the names from the Exile to Jesus, but it seems apparent that Matthew has **crafted** this genealogy. Chronicles was something that Matthew’s audience could fact-check (it is not a new discovery). Showing connection is more important than “family tree accuracy”. It seems that at times “father of” can just as easily mean “ancestor of”.

So, we need to bear this in mind when reading Genesis 5, and with all genealogies in Scripture.

Note the following from Longman's commentary on Genesis:

Ancient genealogies are fluid; that is they can change in order to reflect contemporary social and political realities. They can also skip generations, rendering them useless for trying to compute how much actual time is covered by the genealogy. According to Wilson, "genealogies are not normally created for historical purposes. They are not intended to be historical records. Rather in the Bible, as well as in the ancient Near Eastern literature and in the anthropological material, genealogies seem to have been created for domestic, political-jural, and religious purposes, and historical information is preserved in the genealogies only incidentally."²¹

Longman also points out that the Sumerian Kings List, which aims to show kingship as a gift from the gods, uses life spans of thousands of years (longest being 36,000). The life spans in this list also reduce drastically after the flood. Thus, we should at least consider the possibility that something more is going on with the ages used in Genesis 5.

While our Old Testament is based strongly on the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint (Greek OT of Paul's time) and Samaritan Pentateuch (first 5 books) do not give identical numbers for Genesis 5. Same occurs for Genesis 11. Rather than errors, it is better to see that the numbers may not be as important back then, as they are to us today.

Many of the commentators, point out that Genesis 5 is showing that they all died. Luther would no doubt argue that in this that they died still waiting for the promised seed.

¹ Longman, T., III. (2016). [Genesis](#) (T. Longman III, Ed.; p. 94). Zondervan.