

List–Genealogy Form

Introduction

The biblical form of the “list” has several manifestations, one of which is the genealogy. There are two basic types of genealogical list, segmented and linear. The segmented genealogy is broad rather than deep, demonstrating horizontal relationships between contemporary kin going back at most three generations. The linear genealogy is deep rather than broad, illustrating a family line going back 3-14 generations. Linear genealogies in particular tend to be fluid, meaning that names can be lost or introduced and generations telescoped to fit the standard depth.

The linear genealogy was a standard form in priestly and dynastic records, biographies, and speeches of praise or blame. The function of the genealogy in priestly and dynastic records was to maintain and publicize the purity of the bloodline, while the function of the genealogy in biographies and speeches of praise or blame was to demonstrate the illustrious (or shameful) character attributes of one’s ancestors. (The ancients had a somewhat more static view that character can be passed from one generation to the next.)

Structure

There is only one component element of the linear genealogy—the expression of lineal descent. The structure of this list lies less in the variety of component elements than in their arrangement. Be alert to the numerical organization of Matthew’s genealogy and to formulaic variations between the generations. Recalling Jesus’ shameful death and rumors of his illegitimate birth, consider how Matthew counters these charges in his genealogy (Matt 1:1-17).

¹ The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

² Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. ³ Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴ Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse, ⁶ Jesse the father of David the king.

David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah. ⁷ Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asaph. ⁸ Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah. ⁹ Uzziah became the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz

the father of Hezekiah. ¹⁰ Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, Amos the father of Josiah. ¹¹ Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile.

¹² After the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³ Zerubbabel the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴ Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵ Eliud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶ Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷ Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

Content

Linear genealogies list of a series of vertical relationships over time. The choice of ancestors and the numerical structure of the list are significant factors in describing the descendent.

Function

Linear genealogies functioned in dynastic and priestly disputes to legitimate hierarchies, especially when someone’s authority was questioned, when there was a vacancy in office, or when a succession crisis occurred. They were used in ancestor cults to invoke the intercessory gifts of those ancestors accorded the most power. Shallow linear genealogies were used to identify people (e.g., “Jesus son of Joseph”).

For Further Practice

Luke 3:23-38

Genesis 5

Genesis 36