

# What about Cainan?

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Previous editions of *TJ* have discussed the issue of the extra Cainan in the genealogical record of Luke chapter 3 as compared to the record in Genesis chapter 11. This article summarizes previous works which support the case that the extra Cainan is a very early copyist mistake in a Greek manuscript. In particular, the extra Cainan is absent from the Hebrew. It is also absent from the very earliest New Testament manuscript with Luke 3:36, as well as the ancient Jewish and Christian chronologers.

People often ask how to explain the difference between Luke 3:36 and Gen. 11:12; in that Luke 3:36 has the extra name ‘Cainan’. Some skeptics have used this difference to attack biblical inerrancy. However, it is important to note that biblical inerrancy, derived from the teaching that Scripture is ‘God-breathed’ (2 Tim. 3:15–17, cf. 2 Pet. 1:20–21) and ‘cannot be broken’ (John 10:35), has to refer to the original autographs that God directly inspired, not to copies or translations. The Cainan difference is *not* an error in the original autographs of Scripture, but one of the *extremely few* copyist’s errors in the manuscripts available today.

To put this into perspective, we have the original text to 99% accuracy in the Old Testament and >98% in the New Testament. Most of the variation in the remaining <2% is merely stylistic, and not a single doctrine of Christianity relies on a debatable text.<sup>1</sup>

## Biblical inerrancy

The vital doctrine of biblical inerrancy, taught as shown above, by Christ (John 10:35) and His apostles (2 Tim. 3:15–17, 2 Pet. 1:20–21), is not affected in the least.<sup>2,3</sup> All the major creationist organizations include in their Statement of Faith that inerrancy applies to the originals. For example AiG’s statement of faith says:

‘The 66 books of the Bible are the written Word of God. The Bible is divinely inspired and inerrant throughout. Its assertions are factually true in all the *original autographs*. It is the supreme authority, not only in all matters of faith and conduct, but in everything it teaches’<sup>4</sup>

Other major evangelical organizations, such as the Evangelical Theological Society, affirm that inerrancy applies to the originals. Also, the *Chicago Statement on*

*Biblical Inerrancy*,<sup>5</sup> signed by many evangelical leaders, is a very clear and detailed exposition of inerrancy, and states in Article X, which I endorse:

‘WE AFFIRM that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

‘WE DENY that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.’

It’s important to note that there is a world of difference between: ‘Inerrant originals once existed, and can be plausibly reconstructed from fallible copies’ and ‘The originals were errant.’

## An easy mistake

Having established that the Cainan difference does not damage biblical inerrancy in the original manuscripts, it is helpful to try to plausibly reconstruct how the error crept into the copies, as I have addressed previously.<sup>6</sup>

Note that the Greek New Testament was originally written without punctuation or spaces between words. So Luke 3:35–38 would have been originally written as below. In this manuscript, **TOYKAINAN** (*toukainan* = *the son of Cainan*) could have been on the end of the third line:

ΤΟΥΣΑΡΟΥΧΤΟΥΡΑΓΑΥΤΟΥΦΑΛΕΓΤΟΥΕΒΕΡΤΟΥΣΑΛΑ  
 ΤΟΥΑΡΦΑΞΑΔΤΟΥΣΗΜΤΟΥΝΩΕΤΟΥΛΑΜΕΧΤΟΥΜΑΘΟΥΣΑΛΑ  
 ΤΟΥΕΝΩΧΤΟΥΙΑΡΕΔΤΟΥΜΑΛΕΛΕΗΑ **TOYKAINAN**  
 ΤΟΥΕΝΩΣΤΟΥΣΗΘΤΟΥΑΔΑΜΤΟΥΘΕΟΥ

But suppose an early copyist of Luke’s gospel was copying the first line, but his eyes glanced at the end of the third line at **TOYKAINAN**. Then he would have written it on the first line as well:

ΤΟΥΣΑΡΟΥΧΤΟΥΡΑΓΑΥΤΟΥΦΑΛΕΓΤΟΥΕΒΕΡΤΟΥΣΑΛΑ **TOYKAINAN**  
 ΤΟΥΑΡΦΑΞΑΔΤΟΥΣΗΜΤΟΥΝΩΕΤΟΥΛΑΜΕΧΤΟΥΜΑΘΟΥΣΑΛΑ  
 ΤΟΥΕΝΩΧΤΟΥΙΑΡΕΔΤΟΥΜΑΛΕΛΕΗΑ **TOYKAINAN**  
 ΤΟΥΕΝΩΣΤΟΥΣΗΘΤΟΥΑΔΑΜΤΟΥΘΕΟΥ

In English, the passage reads as follows (keeping the same line formatting, and with italics indicating words added by the translators which were understood in the Greek, so the passage makes sense in English):

*the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.*

## The Septuagint source

**Table 1.** Age of Genesis 11 patriarchs at birth of next in line

Patriach	Hebrew text	LXX	Josephus
Shem	2	2	12
Arphaxad	35	135	135
Cainan	...	130	...
Shelah	30	130	130
Eber	34	134	134
Peleg	30	130	130
Reu	32	132	130
Serug	30	130	132
Nahor	29	79	120
Terah	70	70	70
Total (Flood to Terah's firstborn) <sup>10</sup>	292	1072	993

It is well known that the New Testament quotations of the Old Testament usually follow the LXX, or Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, written in Alexandria, Egypt, in about 250–150 BC (named because, according to legend, it was translated by 72 rabbis, six from each of the 12 tribes of Israel—*septuaginta* is Latin for 70).

So if a copyist of Luke's gospel is responsible for the error, how come it is in the LXX as well? A clue to the solution is that the extra Cainan in Genesis 11 is found only in manuscripts of the LXX that were written long after Luke's gospel. The oldest LXX manuscripts do not have this extra Cainan.

### Flavius Josephus

Larry Pierce, the producer of the *Online Bible*,<sup>7</sup> and editor of the new English translation of Archbishop Ussher's (1581–1656) *Annals of the World*,<sup>8</sup> confirmed this with information from Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (AD 37/38–c. 100) about Cainan of Luke 3:36.<sup>9</sup> Table 1 above is Mr Pierce's comparison of the genealogy from the Hebrew text, the LXX, and Josephus<sup>10</sup> giving the age of the Father at the birth of the son mentioned (in the case of Shem the figure given is the time since the Flood):

Pierce points out:

'If Josephus did not use the LXX he must have used some document based on the LXX for it [Jewish Antiquities<sup>10</sup>] repeats too many of the mistakes of the LXX to be a chance occurrence. It appears at the time of Josephus, the extra generation of Cainan was not in the LXX text or the document that Josephus used otherwise Josephus would have included it! If the LXX contained the reading, Josephus either omitted it by mistake (which is not likely) or held the reading in low esteem. We know that when Jerome (AD c. 347–419/420) translated

the Vulgate (Latin translation of the Bible) in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, he did not use the LXX in spite of Augustine's (354–430) pleadings because Jerome said it was too inaccurate. He used the Hebrew text which did not include the variation.'<sup>11</sup>

### Julius Africanus

Pierce goes on to show<sup>12</sup> that further information comes from Julius Africanus, (AD c. 180–c. 250), 'the first Christian historian known to have produced a universal chronology.'<sup>13</sup> In his chronology (see table 2), written in c. AD 220, he also omitted this

mysterious Cainan.<sup>14</sup> The numbers of years in his chronology (right column), identical to those of the LXX (clearly inflated from the reliable Masoretic Text<sup>15,16</sup>), show that he must have used the LXX—but no Cainan even as late as AD 220!

Pierce summarizes:

'I think we have more than enough evidence that would stand up in any court of law to show that every single copy we have of the LXX text was corrupted some time after AD 220. The copies of the LXX available to both Josephus and Africanus did not include this spurious generation. It is also not in either the Samaritan Pentateuch or the Hebrew manuscripts.

'All these predate the New Testament Greek text. And while Josephus was not a Christian writer and would not have been influenced by copies of Luke genealogies, Julius Africanus was a devout Christian. In his Epistle to Aristides ch. 3, he made an extensive study of the genealogies of both Luke and Matthew. In fact he quotes Luke 3:23.<sup>17</sup> Hence, Africanus had copies of both the gospel of Luke and Matthew. So one cannot claim that Africanus did not know about Luke's gospel or his genealogies. If the copies of Luke's writings had

**Table 2.** Africanus chronology from creation to Reu

Adam to Noah	2262
Arphaxad begat Salah	135
Salah begat Eber	130
Eber begat Peleg	134
Peleg begat Reu	130

this spurious Cainan, no doubt Africanus would have amended his chronology to include it. In fact, the earliest known extant copy of Luke, the 102-page (originally 144) papyrus codex of the Bodmer Collection labelled P<sup>75</sup> (dated between AD 175 and 225<sup>18</sup>), omits the extra Cainan. Thus the reading in Luke 3:36 cannot be shown to exist before AD 220.<sup>19</sup>

### John Gill

The great reformed Baptist theologian Dr John Gill provided further strong support that Cainan is a spurious addition. He summarized the textual evidence as follows in his major Bible commentary. And Gill was probably the greatest Hebraist of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (before the rise of ‘higher criticism’) and staunchly defended biblical inerrancy, and only very rarely pointed out textual problems:

‘Ver. 36. Which was the son of Cainan, ... This Cainan is not mentioned by Moses in Ge 11:12 nor has he ever appeared in any Hebrew copy of the Old Testament, nor in the Samaritan version, nor in the Targum; nor is he mentioned by Josephus, nor in 1 Ch 1:24 where the genealogy is repeated; nor is it in Beza’s most ancient Greek copy of Luke: it indeed stands in the present copies of the Septuagint, but was not originally there; and therefore could not be taken by Luke from thence, but seems to be owing to some early negligent transcriber of Luke’s gospel, and since put into the Septuagint to give it authority: I say “early”, because it is in many Greek copies, and in the Vulgate Latin, and all the Oriental versions, even in the Syriac, the oldest of them; but ought not to stand neither in the text, nor in any version: for certain it is, there never was such a Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, for Salah was his son; and with him the next words should be connected.’<sup>20</sup>

There is another explanation consistent with inerrancy of the original autographs. This is that the first ‘Cainan’ was left out in extant Masoretic and Samaritan Old Testament manuscripts as well as 1 Chronicles, but was preserved in LXX manuscripts.

But Henry Morris points out that this is unlikely; rather, the former is likely to be the correct explanation, especially as Jewish copyists of the OT were far more accurate than Gentile copyists of the NT.<sup>21</sup> The evidence from Josephus, Africanus and Gill shows conclusively that the extra name ‘Cainan’ is not part of God’s original Word, but is due to a later copyist’s error.

Either way, this extra name ‘Cainan’ cannot be used as an argument against biblical inerrancy, nor can it support ideas of gaps in the Genesis genealogies, despite claims of some long-agers. For more information, see the my TJ

article on Biblical chronogenealogies.<sup>6</sup>

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15. For a defense of the Masoretic text vs the altered Septuagint (LXX), see Williams, P., Some remarks preliminary to a biblical chronology, *TJ* 12(1): 98–106, 1998. For example, the LXX would have Methuselah surviving the Flood by 17 years.
16. Pierce has suggested elsewhere that the rabbis who translated the LXX arbitrarily added about 700 years to the biblical chronology to make it agree with the exaggerated Egyptian chronology of the Egyptian priest Manetho (fl. c. 300 BC). See Pierce, L., In the days of Peleg, *Creation* 22(1):46–49, 1999.
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