

Biblical chronogenealogies

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A straightforward reading of the biblical genealogies according to the reliable Masoretic text shows that Adam was created about 4,000 BC, and this was on the 6th day of creation. The existing copies of the Septuagint and Samaritan Pentateuch are not as reliable, but at most could only stretch this date out to about 5400 BC. There is no justifiable reason to believe in gaps within the *chronogenealogies* of Genesis, as the arguments presented for such views are denied by contextual, linguistic and historical analysis.

Which text should be used?

There are three main ancient texts of the Old Testament:

- The Masoretic Text used by modern Hebrew Bibles and which is the basis behind most English Old Testaments. It is named after specialist copiers of the Bible called *Masorettes* ('transmitters'), who standardized the text and added vowel points to aid pronunciation to the text, which previously had only consonants. The Masorettes did not standardize the vowel points until the 7th or 8th century AD.¹
- The Septuagint (LXX) was a Greek translation of the OT. The name comes from the Latin septuaginta (70), because according to legend, 72 rabbis (six from each of the twelve tribes) were responsible for the translation, in Alexandria in c. 250 BC. In reality, it was composed over decades, beginning in the 3rd century BC. The multiple translators mean that it is uneven in accuracy. The Pentateuch is considered to be reasonably reliable, while other sections are less accurate. The LXX was in widespread use by Jews outside Israel in NT times. This explains why it was commonly (but far from exclusively) cited in the New Testament—if not, then people like the noble Bereans of Acts 17:11 might have checked the Apostles' teachings by the OT and said, 'That's not how we find it in our Bible.'²
- The Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) is a Hebrew version dating from the 1st century BC. After the Assyrians deported many of the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, they imported colonists to the area centred around Samaria. The Samaritans were mixed descendants of these colonists and Jews. They had their own system of worship centred at Mount Gerizim (John 4:20–21), and

based only on the Law of Moses, or Pentateuch, which was slightly different from the one used by the mainstream Jews. The SP differs from the Masoretic text in about 6000 places. In about 2000 of these cases, it agrees with the LXX against the MT.

As shown in table 1, these three give different ages for the patriarchs at the birth of the next one in line and their deaths, but they all agree within less than 1,400 total years for the chronology from creation to Abraham. Biblical chronology should be based on the Masoretic Text, because the other texts show evidence of editing.³ For example, The Septuagint chronologies are demonstrably inflated, as they contain the (obvious) error that Methuselah lived 17 years after the Flood.

Date of creation

We can define the year of the creation of the world as AM 1 (AM = Anno Mundi = year of the world). Adam died in AM 930, Noah was born in AM 1056, and the Flood occurred 600 years later, which was in AM 1656. Abraham was born when Terah was 130, 352 years after the Flood, in AM 2008. This narrows down the possible range for the date of creation. The only reason for the uncertainty is the dating of Abraham, and that depends on the dates of the sojourn in Egypt and the dates of the Israelite monarchy. Once this is known, the other dates follow mathematically.

The late Dr Gerhard Hasel, who was Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology at Andrews University, calculated from the Masoretic Text that Abraham was born in about 2170 BC. Thus, the Flood occurred at 2522 BC and Creation at 4178 BC.⁴ Dr Hasel rightly assumed that there were no gaps in the genealogies, as will be justified below.

Do the genealogies have gaps?

James Barr, then Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford University, wrote in 1984:

'... probably, so far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Genesis 1–11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that: ... the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to later stages in the biblical story.'⁵

Barr, consistent with his neo-orthodox views, does not **believe** Genesis, but he understood what the Hebrew so clearly **taught**. It was only the perceived need to harmonize with the alleged age of the earth which led him and people like him to think anything different—it was nothing to do with the text itself.

Long-ager Davis Young points out:

'The church fathers also suggested that the world was less than six thousand years old at the time of Christ because of the chronology of the genealogical

accounts of Genesis 5 and 11 and other chronological information in Scripture.⁶

The Jewish historian Josephus (AD 37/38–c. 100), in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, also presents a chronology that has no hint of any gaps. This is significant since this indicates that the Jews of his time never saw any. The names and ages in his writings show that Josephus mostly used the LXX.

‘This calamity [Flood] began in the 600th year of Noah’s government [age] ... Now he [Moses] says that this flood began on the 27th [17th] day of the forementioned month [Nisan]; and this was 2,656 [1,656]⁷ years from Adam, the first man; and the time is written down in our sacred books, those who then lived having noted down, with great accuracy, both the births and dates of illustrious men.

‘For indeed Seth was born when Adam was in his 230th year, who lived 930 years. Seth begat Enos in his 205th year, who, when he had lived 912 years, delivered the government to Cainan his son, whom he had in his 190th year; he lived 905 years. Cainan,

when he lived 910 years, had his son Malaleel, who was born in his 170th year. This Malaleel, having lived 895 years, died, leaving his son Jared, whom he begat when he was in his 165th year. He lived 962 years; and then his son Enoch succeeded him, who was born when his father was 162 years old. Now he, when he had lived 365 years, departed, and went to God; whence it is that they have not written down his death. Now Methuselah, the son of Enoch, who was born to him when he was 165 years old, had Lamech for his son when he was 187 years of age, to whom he delivered the government, which he had retained for 969 years. Now Lamech, when he had governed 777 years, appointed Noah his son to be ruler of the people, who was born to Lamech when he was 182 years old, and retained the government for 950 years. These years collected together make up the sum before set down; but let no one enquire into the deaths of these men, for they extended their lives along together with their children and grandchildren, but let him have regard for their births only. ...⁸

‘I will now treat of the Hebrews.

The son of Phaleg, whose father was Heber, was Ragau, whose son was Serug, to whom was born Nahor; his son was Terah, who was the father of Abraham, who accordingly was the tenth from Noah, and was born in the 290th year after the Deluge; for Terah begat Abram in his 70th year.⁹ Nahor begat Haran [*sic*—Terah?] when he was 120 years old; Nahor was born to Serug in his 132nd year; Ragau had Serug at 130; at the same age also Phaleg had Ragau; Heber begat Phaleg in his 134th year; he himself being begotten by Sala when he was 130 years old whom Arphaxad had for his son at the 135th year of his age, Arphaxad was the son of Shem, and born 12 years after the Deluge.^{10,16,17}

This comes from ‘Book 1, containing the interval of 3,831 years: From the creation to the death of Isaac.’ Once more, this rules out any gaps or long creation days.

To demonstrate that the quotes of Barr and Josephus are not merely the fallacy of *Argumentum ad verecundiam* (appeal to authority), here is some exegetical evidence for the tightness of the chronology:

Grammar

Table 1. Chronogenealogies of the Patriarchs according to different textual traditions.

NAME	Age at begetting next in line			Remaining years of life		
	LXX	Masoretic Text	Samaritan Pentateuch	LXX	Masoretic Text	Samaritan Pentateuch
Adam	230	130	130	700	800	800
Seth	205	105	105	707	807	807
Enosh	190	90	90	715	815	815
Cainan	170	70	70	740	840	840
Mahalaleel	165	65	65	730	830	830
Jared	162	162	62	800	800	785
Enoch	165	65	65	200	300	300
Methuselah	167	187	67	802	782	653
Lamech	188	182	53	565	595	600
Noah	500	500	500	450	450	450
Total Adam to Flood	2242	1656	1307			
Shem	100	100	100	500	500	500
Arphaxad	135	35	135	430	403	303
[Cainan] ⁱ	[130]	–	–	[330]	–	–
Shelah	130	30	130	330	403	303
Eber	134	34	134	370	430	270
Peleg	130	30	130	209	209	109
Reu	132	32	132	207	207	107
Serug	130	30	130	200	200	100
Nahor	79	29	79	129	119	69
Terah ⁱⁱ	70	70	70	135	135	75
Total Flood to Abraham	1070	290	940			

- i. The inclusion of an extra Cainan in the Septuagint is discussed in a later section.
- ii. Note that Abraham was not Terah’s firstborn. Gen. 12:4 says Abraham was 75 when he left Haran, and this was soon after Terah died at 205 (Gen. 11:32), and the difference (205–75) means Terah was actually 130 years old when Abraham was born, not 70 (Ussher seems to have been the first modern chronologist to have noticed this point). The latter figure refers to Terah’s age when the oldest of the three sons mentioned was born, probably Haran.

11:11, 13, 17, etc.). Remaining usages of this verbal form in the Hiphil in the book of Genesis reveal that the expression “and he fathered” (*wayyôled*) is used in the sense of a direct physical offspring (Genesis 5:3; 6:10). A direct physical offspring is evident in each of the remaining usages of the Hiphil of *wayyôled*, “and he fathered”, in the OT (Judges 11:1; 1 Chronicles 8:9; 14:3; 2 Chronicles 11:21; 13:21; 24:3). The same expression reappears twice in the genealogies in 1 Chronicles where the wording “and Abraham fathered Isaac” (1 Chronicles 1:34; cf. 5:37 [6:11]) rules out that the named son is but a distant descendant of the patriarch instead of a direct physical offspring. Thus the phrase “and he fathered PN” in Genesis 5 and 11 cannot mean Adam “began an ancestor of Seth.” The view that Seth and any named son in Genesis 5 and 11 is but a distant descendant falters in view of the evidence of the Hebrew language used.¹⁵

Where can the ‘gaps’ be inserted?

Another problem is where the gaps could be plausibly inserted. There are a number of places where a gap is explicitly ruled out:

- Seth: Seth is definitely a direct son of Adam and Eve, and seen as a replacement for Abel, killed by Cain (Genesis 4:25).
- Enosh: must be a son of Seth, because Seth named him (Gen. 4:25).
- Enoch: Jude 14 says Enoch was seventh from Adam, which indicates straightforward father-son relationships from Adam to Enoch.
- Noah: Lamech named him, so Lamech must be his father, not just an ancestor (Gen. 5:29).
- Shem, Ham and Japheth were definitely ordinary sons of Noah, since they accompanied him on the Ark.
- Arphaxad was plainly a son of Shem, because he was born two years after the Flood (Gen. 11:10).
- Abram, Haran and Nahor were Terah’s ordinary sons, since they journeyed together from Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 11:31).
- Methuselah: Enoch, a pre-Flood prophet (Jude 14), gave his son a name meaning ‘when he dies it shall be sent’, and the Masoretic chronology without any gaps would place his death in the year of the Flood.

Some commentaries claim that Methuselah means ‘man of the spear’, but the Hebrew Christian scholar Dr Arnold Fruchtenbaum argues:

‘[T]he name Methuselah could mean one of two things. Therefore, it will either mean “man of the spear” or “when he dies it shall be sent”. The debate is not over the second part of the word which, in Hebrew, is *shalach*; and *shalach* means “to send”. While the concept of sending is the primary meaning of *shalach*, it has a secondary meaning of being

thrown or cast forth in a context where the sending is with heavy force or speed. On that basis, some would conclude that *shalach* would mean either “missile” or “dart” or “spear”. However, that is a derived meaning because the primary meaning of *shalach* is “to send”, as any lexicon shows.

‘Ultimately, how one deals with *shalach* depends on how you deal with the first part of the word, which has the two Hebrew letters spelling *mat*. Based upon the root, then the meaning would indeed be “man”. Hence, commentaries conclude that it means “man of the spear” or “man of the dart”. However, the use of the term “spear” or “dart” is not the meaning of *shalach* in any lexicon that I know of. It is simply a derived meaning going from sending to throwing to trying to make a specific object. If *mat* was intended to mean man, if one was to keep it strictly literal, it would not mean “man of the spear” or “man of the dart”, but “a man sent”.

‘The second option for *mat* is that it comes from the root that means “to die”. Furthermore, the letter “*vav*” between *mat* and *shalach* gives it a verbal force. That is why I prefer to take it strictly literally, using the root “to die” and literally it would mean “he dies it shall be sent”.

‘I prefer that translation of the name, “when he dies it shall be sent”, for two reasons. The first reason is that I find it fitting the Hebrew parsing of the name much better. Secondly, it is better in the wider context since, if we follow the chronology of Genesis, the same year he died was the year of the flood. I do not think this was purely coincidental.’¹⁸

The number of missing generations would need to be huge

It’s important to note that those who wish to extend the times between creation, the Flood and Abraham to fit their geological interpretations needs *far* more than just a few missing names. Normally, people want to push the Flood right back, and since the Genesis 11 chronologies are the ones that link the Flood to Abraham, these are the ones that must be ‘expanded’. Ross ‘dates’ the Flood to ‘between twenty thousand and thirty thousand years ago’.¹⁹ But since the Genesis 11 people had sons at age 35 or less, to add even 10,000 years would take over 250 missing generations! One must wonder how a genealogy could miss out all these without any trace. And since many of the names that are mentioned include no trace of any deeds or sayings by them, why would the writer bother to mention these when so many others had been omitted?

Is Cainan a gap?^{20,21}

Ross also points out that Luke 3:36 has the extra name Cainan, which is not mentioned in Genesis 11:12.¹⁴ He uses

this to claim, in effect, here's one proven gap, so there's nothing to prevent unlimited multiplication of gaps.

This extra Cainan appears in most Greek manuscripts of Luke and the LXX of Genesis 11. But the name was probably not in the original autographs, as shown by the following textual evidence:

- 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.
- The earliest known extant copy of Luke omits the extra Cainan. This is the 102-page (originally 144) papyrus codex of the Bodmer Collection labeled P⁷⁵ (dated between AD 175 and 225²²).
- Josephus often used the LXX as his source, but did not mention the second Cainan (see above).
- Julius Africanus (c. AD 180–c. 250) was 'the first Christian historian known to have produced a universal chronology.' In his chronology, written in c. AD 220, he also followed the LXX ages but once again omitted this mysterious Cainan.

Now that the extra Cainan is shown not to have been in the original manuscripts, it is helpful to try to plausibly reconstruct how the error crept into the copies.

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 in Figure 1a. In this manuscript, TOYKAINAN (*the son of Cainan*) could have been on the end of the third line.

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 (Figure 1b).

In English, keeping the same line formatting, and with italics indicating words added by the translators which were understood in the Greek, the passage makes sense (Figure 1c).

So if a copyist of Luke's gospel is responsible for the error, why is it in the LXX as well? As shown, it is not in the earlier copies, so must have been added later, by a copyist who wanted to bring it in line with Luke. And further supporting evidence comes from the fact that the ages of 'Cainan' at the birth of his son and at his death are identical to the dates of Shelah, the next one in line. This is not surprising—the copyist is confronted with the extra name in Luke, but this provides no ages. So all the copyist can do to maintain the pattern is to repeat the ages of the next patriarch.

The doctrine of biblical inerrancy is not affected in the least by the Cainan difference. As shown, it is *not* an error in the original autographs of Scripture, but one of the *extremely few* copyist's errors in the manuscripts available today.

Conclusion

A straightforward reading of the biblical genealogies from the reliable Masoretic text shows that Adam was created

about 4000 BC and that the Flood occurred around 2500 BC. Contextual, linguistic and historical analyses of the book of Genesis confirm that the *chronogenealogies* are a complete record with no gaps. Creationists who wish to push back the date of the Flood and creation to fit their geological or archaeological theories have no grounds to do this based on the biblical record. They should rather look to their scientific theories to see where the discrepancies lie.

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