

The Genesis Genealogies

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In 1650, James Ussher, the archbishop of Ireland, came up with a detailed timeline for all of the events in the Bible, going all the way back to the creation of man and the universe. According to Ussher's chronology, Adam and Eve were created in the year 4004 BC. In order to date backwards from Abraham to Adam and Eve, Ussher made use of the genealogies given in Genesis 5 and 11. A critical assumption that he made in his interpretation was that these two genealogies were complete (that is, that they contained no gaps or missing names).² Are these genealogies indeed complete as Ussher assumed?

Biblical genealogies are numerous and yet they are probably the most often ignored and least studied portions of the Bible. Most people find genealogies to be uninteresting and difficult to apply to current circumstances. The nature and function of biblical genealogies is also very different from modern genealogies, which can lead to confusion and misunderstanding. For example, telescoping (leaving out some names for the sake of brevity) is common in biblical genealogies but is rare in modern genealogies. Similarly, the key genealogical terms (such as "son" and "father") have much broader meanings in Hebrew than their corresponding English words. An accurate understanding of biblical genealogies is difficult, yet it is important for the understanding of Scripture.³ Having a proper understanding of biblical genealogies is a prerequisite to attempting to address the Genesis genealogies.

The Nature of Biblical Genealogies

In modern times, genealogies are for the purpose of communicating detailed information about history and family relations. Our modern conception of genealogies is very different from how genealogies were used and understood in biblical times. Some background information on genealogies is helpful in order to properly understand and interpret them.

Biblical genealogies fall into three main categories according to their purpose: familial, legal-political, and religious.⁴ Familial (or domestic) genealogies were primarily concerned with inheritance and privileges of firstborn sons. Legal-political genealogies are primarily centered on claims to a hereditary office, but other examples include establishing ancestry for land

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² The interpretation of the Genesis genealogies is a separate and distinct issue from the interpretation of the length of the creation days. Young-earth and old-earth creationists can be found on both sides with regard to these genealogies.

³ Biblical genealogies are not just dry history. For example, Jesus' genealogy (Matthew 1:3-17; Luke 3:23-38) is central to Messianic prophecy.

⁴ A detailed discussion of Hebrew genealogies can be found in the *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), "Introduction to 1 Chronicles: Genealogies."

organization, territorial groupings, and military service. Religious genealogies were primarily used to establish membership in the Aaronic and Levitical priesthoods.

The function of a genealogy largely determines its structure and organization. In each of these cases, there is little reason or need to give a complete listing of names, since it is ancestry, not the actual number of generations, that is important.

Very short genealogies are typically for the purpose of identifying a person's tribal or genealogical grouping. The clearest example of this is the division of Israel into tribes based on which of the 12 patriarchs they were descended from. This tribal division was important for determining traveling arrangements (Numbers 2; 10) and allocation of land (Joshua 13–21). Each tribe was subdivided into divisions and further subdivided into clans according to which son and grandson of the patriarchs they were descended from. For example, the Levites were assigned different duties according to which Levitical division they belonged to. So, it was usually sufficient to list only a person's tribe, division, and clan to identify their place in society. This interest in genealogical identification is also seen in the time of King David and again in the time of return from exile. At these later times, genealogies often were given in terms of other key historical figures (Aaron, Moses, David, etc.) rather than going all the way back to the patriarchs. For example, Matthew starts his Gospel with "Jesus, son of David, son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). This very terse genealogy is a prelude to Matthew's longer genealogy (Matthew 1:3–17). Some additional examples:

1) **Moses and Aaron – Exodus 6:16–20, Numbers 26:57–59; and 1 Chronicles 6:1–3; 23:6, 12–13**

With Moses and Aaron playing such central roles in the Exodus, it is not surprising that their genealogical information is repeated four times in the Old Testament. This genealogy serves as a striking example of telescoping a genealogy to include only the tribe, division, and clan. The genealogies defining the divisions and clans of the Levites are given in Numbers 3:17–37; 26:57–59; and 1 Chronicles 6:1–3; 23:6–23. We see from these passages that Moses and Aaron were of the tribe of Levi (the Levites), the division of Kohath (the Kohathites), and the clan of Amram (the Amramites). Using Scripture and other historical sources, we can reasonably conclude that the remaining names (probably at least 6) between Amram and Moses were intentionally left out. A more detailed study of these genealogies is given later. (See Table 3, The Genealogies of Moses and Joshua.)

2) **Korah – Numbers 16:1**

In the second census during Israel's desert wanderings, a few noteworthy individuals are listed along with each tribe's genealogy. Korah, son of Izhar, son of Kohath, the son of Levi led a rebellion against Moses during the desert wandering and was engulfed by the earth along with his followers. This genealogy specifies his clan (Izhar), division (Kohath), and tribe (Levi) and telescopes out the remaining generations between Korah and Izhar.

3) **Dathan and Abiram – Numbers 16:1; 26:5–9**

Along with Korah, Dathan and Abiram participated in the rebellion against Moses and died with him. Because of their notoriety, Dathan and Abiram are listed among the Reubenites in the

second Israelite census. In this genealogy, we are given only their clan (Eliab), division (Pallu), and tribe (Reuben).

4) **Zelophehads' daughters – Numbers 26:28–32; 27:1**

Zelophehad and his daughters are listed as noteworthy among the Manassehites in the second census of Israel. Because he had five daughters and no sons, they came to Moses about the issue of inheritance. As a result, it became law that daughters would receive the inheritance if there were no sons (Numbers 27). This genealogy (Zelophehad, son of Hopher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, son of Joseph) is analogous to the preceding examples except that one more name is included beyond the tribe (Manasseh), division (Machir), and clan (Gilead).

Word Meaning

Another important difference between ancient and modern genealogies is vocabulary. In modern English, we have a whole host of words to describe precise familial relationships. For example, we have son, grandson, uncle, father, cousin, brother, and ancestor. Hebrew has a very small vocabulary, so only a few Hebrew words carry all of these modern meanings. The Hebrew words for “son” (*ben*, 1121) means son, grandson, great grandson, and descendent. For example, Genesis 29:5 refers to Laban the *son* (*ben*) of Nahor but we know that he was the grandson. Similarly, “father” (*ab*, 1)⁵ means father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and ancestor. We find in Genesis 28:13 that God tells Jacob, “I am the LORD, the God of your *father* [*ab*] Abraham and the God of Isaac,” (emphasis added) but Abraham was the *grandfather* of Jacob. Similarly, father (*ab*) can refer generically to ancestors, as in when Elijah cried, “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors [*ab*]” (1 Kings 19:4). According to *Vine's*, *ab* “may refer to the first man, a ‘forefather,’ a clan (Jeremiah 35:6), a tribe (Joshua 19:47), a group with a special calling (1 Chronicles 24:19), a dynasty (1 Kings 15:3), or a nation (Joshua 24:3). Thus ‘father’ does not necessarily mean the man who directly sired a given individual” (*Vine's* “father,” but see also HGKSB, p. 1574). Similar word usage also applies to the New Testament in Greek, such as the genealogies in Matthew and Luke.

The word “begat” (*yalad*, 3205) is another word that is commonly used in biblical genealogies. (The NIV translates *yalad* as “became the father of” or “gave birth to.”) Like father (*ab*) and son (*ben*), this word has a much broader meaning than the corresponding English usage (*Vine's*, “to bear”). An example of this broader usage is found in Deuteronomy 32:18, where God reminds Israel that He “begat” them. Similarly in Numbers 11:12, Moses declares that he had not “begotten” Israel and hence was not responsible for them.

Numerous examples of the broad use of genealogical terms can be given from Scripture but a few clear examples are given here.

1) **Daniel 5**

Belshazzar is described as the “son” of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 5:22) and likewise Nebuchadnezzar is called his “father” (Daniel 5:2, 11, 18). However, Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus and hence not even biologically related to Nebuchadnezzar. So, Belshazzar was “son” in the sense of being Nebuchadnezzar’s legal heir.

⁵ *Ab* is the root of both Abram (“exalted father”) and Abraham (“father of many [nations]”) (Genesis 17:5).

2) **Ruth 4:17**

At the end of the book of Ruth, Boaz and Ruth have their first son, Obed (Ruth 4:13, 17). In verse 4:17, the people declare, “there is a son born to Naomi.” Clearly, Naomi was not the actual mother of Obed but is the mother-in-law of Ruth, who is the actual mother. Naomi’s husband, Elimelech, and her two sons died, leaving Elimelech and Naomi without heirs. Boaz married Ruth in fulfillment of the Levirate law, which was enacted to ensure sons to continue the family line (Deuteronomy 25:5–6). The first son of a Levirate marriage was legally the son of the dead husband. Since Ruth’s father-in-law, Elimelech, was also dead, Obed was also legally the son of Elimelech and Naomi. So, Obed was the legal son of Naomi but the biological son of Ruth.

3) **Matthew 1:12 and Luke 3:27**

In both Matthew and Luke, Zerubbabel is listed as the son of Shealtiel. (Ezra 3:2, 8, 5:2; Nehemiah 12:1; Haggai 1:1, 12; 2:2 also say the same thing.) But in 1 Chronicles 3:17–19 we find that Zerubbabel was actually the son of Shealtiel’s brother, Pedaiah. While it is not stated in the Bible, it is reasonable to assume that Pedaiah died early and that his uncle, Shealtiel, adopted Zerubbabel. So, Pedaiah was the biological father of Zerubbabel, but Shealtiel was his legal (adoptive) father.⁶

4) **1 Chronicles 1:36**

This verse lists the sons of Eliphaz, the son of Esau. In the Hebrew text, seven names are listed without comment or connecting words, so it would be easy to assume that all seven people are the male children of Eliphaz. However, by comparing these names with Genesis 36:11–12 we see that the sixth name (Timna) was the concubine of Eliphaz and the seventh name (Amalek) was the son of Eliphaz by Timna. The chronicler omitted this distinction for brevity since the readers would have been familiar with the listing in Genesis. The NIV inserts the word “by” in front of Timna and sets it apart from the preceding five names to make this clear to modern readers.

5) **Genesis 46**

In this chapter, we find a listing of the names of Jacob/Israel’s 70 descendants (v. 27) as they prepared to move from Canaan to Egypt. The first point that should be noticed is that the phrase “sons [*ben*] of Israel” (v. 8, 27) is applied to his sons, grandsons, a daughter (Dinah, v. 15), and even a granddaughter (Serah, v. 17). This neatly demonstrates that *ben* is being used to refer to descendants generically and is not restricted to just immediate male sons. The word “bore” (*yalad*) is used in an identical sense in the four summary statements that list the number of “sons” corresponding to each of Jacob’s wives (v. 15, 18, 22, 25). For example, “These are the sons [*ben*] of Rachel, which were born [*yalad*] to Jacob: all the souls were fourteen” (Genesis 46:22 KJV). We know that Rachel had only 2 sons (Joseph and Benjamin) so this listing clearly includes her grandchildren. That *yalad* can be used to refer to descendants generically is of critical importance because this is the same verb that is used in the Genesis genealogies.

6) **Genesis 48:1–6**

⁶ See Gleason L Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 216–19. Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 201–2.

Shortly before Jacob (Israel) died, he adopted both of Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, as his own sons. Jacob told Joseph, "Your two sons ... will be reckoned as mine" (Genesis 48:5 NIV). So both Manasseh and Ephraim were the biological sons of Joseph but were legally considered sons of Jacob. (This becomes significant later, when the Levites are set apart from the other tribes for priestly service. Joseph's tribe was then split into two tribes, one for each son, to make up for the absence of the Levites and to bring the number of tribes back to 12.)

Telescoping of Genealogies

When names are intentionally left out of a genealogy, it is referred to as "telescoping." In a telescoped genealogy only the highlights are given, usually the names of the most important and relevant people. As an example, if we were to telescope "Abraham was the father of Isaac, who was the father of Jacob," it might read in Hebrew, "Abraham was the father (*ab*) of Jacob" (e.g. Genesis 28:13). In English, this telescoped genealogy would be considered erroneous and should read "grandfather" instead. In Hebrew (and similarly for Greek), this telescoped genealogy would be perfectly true and acceptable because there is no separate word for grandfather in Hebrew and the word "father" (*ab*) includes the meaning grandfather.

Typically when a genealogy is telescoped, the number of names is reduced to an aesthetically pleasing number (usually 10 or a multiple of 7); less important names are omitted until that number is reached. For example, the genealogy of Genesis 4:17–18 contains 7 names. The genealogies in Genesis 5:3–32; 11:10–26; and Ruth 4:18–22 all have 10 names each. The genealogy of the nations (Genesis 10:2–29; 1 Chronicles 1:5–23) contains 70 names. Matthew arranged his genealogy (Matthew 1:2–17) into 3 groups of 14 names each. There are 14 names from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the exile, and 14 from the exile to Jesus Christ. To get the groups of 14, Matthew omitted at least 4 names (see below) and counted Jeconiah's name twice. (See Table 1, Matthew's Genealogy.) Matthew clearly indicates in his gospel that that arrangement was intentional (Matthew 1:17). Whereas Matthew's genealogy is broken into sections, Luke's genealogy (Luke 3:23–38) is given as a single list. Luke has 14 names from Abraham to David, 21 from David to the exile, and 21 from the exile to Jesus Christ (in contrast to Matthew's 14 names each). Luke also has an additional 21 names from Abraham back to Adam. (See Table 2, Luke's Genealogy.)

While modern genealogies are generally intended to be complete, most biblical genealogies are telescoped. Although biblical genealogies are generally not complete, they are still historically accurate. They correctly communicate everything we need to know (ancestry) but not necessarily everything we want to know (absolute genealogical relationships). It is often very difficult or even impossible to know with certainty whether or not a given genealogy is telescoped. The genealogies themselves give little or no indication, so the only way to establish the completeness of a genealogy is to compare it with other biblical genealogies or against history. Such study is difficult, painstaking, and is often inconclusive. Listed below are a few well-known examples where we can definitively say that the genealogies are telescoped.

1) Matthew 1:8 compared to 2 Chronicles 21:4–26:23

Matthew 1:8 has Jehoram listed as the father of Uzziah but there were several generations between these men. The names Ahaziah (2 Chronicles 22:1), Joash (2 Chronicles 22:11), and Amaziah (2 Chronicles 24:27) come between Jehoram and Uzziah. (See Table 1, Matthew's Genealogy.)

2) **Matthew 1:11 compared to 2 Chronicles 36:1–9**

In Matthew 1:11 we read that Josiah is the father of Jeconiah (Jehoiachin). In 2 Chronicles, we see that Josiah is the father of Jehoiakim (2 Chronicles 36:4) and grandfather of Jehoiachin (2 Chronicles 36:8). (See Table 1, Matthew’s Genealogy.)

3) **Luke 3:36 compared to Genesis 10:24, 11:12; 1 Chronicles 1:24**

Luke contains the name Cainan between Shelah and Arphaxad that is missing in Genesis 10:24 and 11:12 and 1 Chronicles 1:24. This potentially gives us definitive evidence that at least Genesis 11 is not complete. It is, however, possible that this extra name was actually the result of a copyist error. If so, then Luke could not be used to demonstrate a gap. Unfortunately, this issue cannot be definitively resolved at this time. Detailed discussion of the evidence for and against this thesis is given below in Cainan—An Extra Name in Genesis 11?

4) **Ezra 7:1–5 compared to 1 Chronicles 6:3–15**

The genealogy of 1 Chronicles 6:3–15 lists the descendants of Aaron down to Jehozadak (Jozadak). Ezra 7 lists Ezra’s own genealogy going back to Aaron. Where the two genealogies overlap, 1 Chronicles contains 22 names and Ezra contains 16 names, making Ezra’s genealogy no more than 70 percent complete.⁷ (See Table 4, Priestly Lineage.) Both genealogies span a time period of about 860 years from the Exodus to the fall of Jerusalem, which suggests that both genealogies are in fact highly telescoped. A thorough search of the Old Testament reveals that there were many high priests during this time period who are not included in either of these two genealogies, which provides additional evidence that these genealogies are not complete. The following high priests are known from the OT but are not included in these genealogies: Jehoiada (2 Kings 12:2), Uriah (2 Kings 16:10–16), possibly two Azariahs (2 Chronicles 26:17, 20; 31:10–31), Eli (1 Samuel 1:9; 14:3) and Abiathar (2 Samuel 8:17).⁸

5) **1 Samuel 16:10–13 compared to 1 Chronicles 2:13–15**

In the 1 Samuel passage, the prophet Samuel goes to anoint one of Jesse’s sons as the new king of Israel. Jesse has his seven eldest sons pass before Samuel, but each is rejected. Finally, David, the eighth son, is brought in and anointed by Samuel as king. We find in 1 Chronicles, however, that David is listed as the seventh son of Jesse. One of David’s brothers is omitted from the list to allow David to occupy the favored seventh position. This may seem a bit odd to modern readers but this was an accepted genealogical practice.

Estimating the Degree of Telescoping

Based on the above discussion and biblical examples, we can see that the telescoping of genealogies was a fairly common practice in ancient times. Such telescoping is perfectly acceptable and literal (based on Hebrew word usage)—even if it may be disconcerting to modern readers. We can also see that it is usually impossible to tell from the genealogy itself whether or

⁷ Four of the six names that appear in the 1 Chronicles but are absent in Ezra appear elsewhere in the 1 Chronicles genealogy. This raises the possibility that some or all of the extra names may have been the result of scribal error (name duplication). Therefore Ezra 7 might not actually be telescoped.

⁸ List taken from the *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), footnote on 1 Chronicles 6:3–15. See also a similar listing given S. Zodhiates, *Hebrew Greek Key Study Bible* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1988), 541.

not it is complete. For a few genealogies, we can identify specific names that have been omitted and where they belong in the list. In general, however, the genealogy establishes only a minimum limit to the number of generations spanned. We have to look at other portions of Scripture or history to estimate the degree of telescoping involved. While the degree of telescoping in a particular genealogy may be uncertain, it is certainly not arbitrary or unlimited. Upper limits on how far a genealogy might be pushed can be reasonably estimated by looking at biblical examples for which we can establish the time span involved.

1) **Ruth 4:18–22; 1 Chronicles 2:5–15; Matthew 1:3–6; and Luke 3:31–33**

The genealogy of David given in the books of Ruth and 1 Chronicles lists 10 names from Perez to David. The remaining genealogies repeat these 10 names but also include Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah as the ancestors of Perez to round out the genealogy to 14 names. The time between Abraham and David spans more than 1,000 years. This time span is too long for the genealogy to be complete. One can estimate that the genealogy is about 20 to 50 percent complete.

2) **Heman, Asaph, and Ethan—1 Chronicles 6:33–47**

At the time of David, there were three head temple musicians, one from each of the 3 divisions of the Levites. There is Heman of the Kohathite division (verses 33–38), Asaph of the Gershonite division (verses 39–42), and Ethan of the Merarite division (verses 44–47). In each case, the genealogies start with Levi, who was the father of Kohath, Gershon, and Merari and ancestor of these three men. So, we have three genealogies side-by-side extending from Levi to the time of King David, yet the genealogies contain 21, 15, and 14 names, respectively, for exactly the same span of time. This suggests that at least the latter two genealogies are highly telescoped. (See Table 5, Head Temple Musicians.)

4) **Jeriah (Jerijah)—1 Chronicles 23:6, 12, 19; 26:31**

Jeriah (or Jerijah) was the head of the Hebronites (a Levitical clan) and put in charge of other men by King David. His genealogy is telescoped to mention only his tribe (Levite), division (Kohathite), and clan (Hebronite). This four-name genealogy covers the same approximately 900-year history as that of Heman, Asaph, and Ethan (see previous point and Table 5, Head Temple Musicians). Since the other three genealogies contain 14 to 21 generations for this same time span, we can conclude that this genealogy is no more than 15 percent complete.

3) **Shebuel (Shubael)—1 Chronicles 23:15–16; 26:24**

Shebuel (or Shubael) was put in charge of the treasury in the time of King David. Both of these genealogies have Shebuel, the son of Gershom, the son of Moses. Both Moses and Gershom lived during the time of the Exodus, while Shebuel lived in the time of King David, some 400 to 500 years later. This genealogy is highly telescoped and was intended only for identifying Shebuel's ancestry from Moses and Gershom.

5) **Ezra 8:1–2**

In this verse, Ezra lists a number of leading men of his time period according to ancestry. Gershom was the son of Phinehas (who was the grandson of Aaron); Daniel was the son of Ithamar (who was the son of Aaron); and Hattush was the son of David. The first two examples span approximately 1,000 years, and the third spans about 500 years. Clearly, these genealogies

are

highly

telescoped!

A Detailed Example: The Mosaic Genealogies

The genealogy of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam illustrates all of the points made above and helps provide a clearer understanding of biblical genealogies. Because of the central importance of these three figures, their genealogy is given four different times in Scripture (Exodus 6:16–20; Numbers 26:57–59; and 1 Chronicles 6:1–3; 23:6, and 12–13) and much supporting information can also be gleaned from other Scripture references.

Each of the Mosaic genealogies lists the same four generations (Levi to Kohath to Amram to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam). By cross-referencing the genealogies with other Scripture verses, we can clearly establish that they are telescoped. We know both Levi and his son, Kohath, entered Egypt (Genesis 46:5–27; Exodus 1:1–4), which was 430 years before the Exodus (Exodus 12:40–41; Acts 7:6). Since Moses was 80 years old at the time of the Exodus (Exodus 7:7), from Kohath to Amram to Moses spans at least 350 years! A typical generation is 20 to 40 years, so one would expect that these genealogies span between 10 and 20 generations. We find in 1 Chronicles 7:20–27 that the genealogy of Ephraim extended down to Joshua, which covers the same period of history as the Mosaic genealogies. Joseph (brother of Levi) and his son Ephraim were alive when the Israelites settled in Egypt (Genesis 41:52; 46:27). There are 12 generations listed from Joseph to Joshua. Since Joshua was alive at the time of the Exodus and was a contemporary of Moses, these 12 generations span the 430-year stay in Egypt. This would fit nicely with a generation being about 40 years. Thus, this genealogy gives (at least) 12 generations that correspond to the same time period as the 4 generations of the Mosaic genealogies. (See Table 3, The Genealogies of Moses and Joshua.) Yet another evidence for telescoping is that Kohath’s descendents at the time of Moses numbered 8,600 men (Numbers 3:27, 28) of whom 2,750 were between the age of 30 and 50 (Numbers 4:36). This number of descendents is inexplicable if this genealogy is not telescoped and Kohath was Moses’ grandfather. Based on these arguments, we can conclude that the Mosaic genealogies are perhaps only 20 to 40 percent complete.

Was Amram the immediate father of Moses and Aaron, or was he their ancestor? A number of evidences show there were quite a few generations separating Amram and Moses:⁹

- a. Kohath to Amram to Moses spans 350 years (as discussed above) and hence requires unnamed generations
- b. Amram and his wife, Jochebed, are mentioned in Exodus 6 as giving rise to Moses. Yet in the account of Exodus 2, the names of Moses’ parents are conspicuously absent. They are simply referred to as “a man of the house of Levi” (vs. 2:1), “a Levite woman” (vs. 2:1), and “the baby’s mother” (vs. 2:8). This makes little sense if Amram and Jochebed are Moses’ mother and father.
- c. 1 Chronicles 24:20 lists the descendents of Amram but does not mention Aaron, Moses, and Miriam; neither does the Exodus account mention additional brothers for Moses.
- d. Jochebed, Amram’s wife, is referred to as the daughter of Levi (Numbers 26:59) and Amram’s father’s (Kohath’s) sister (Exodus 6:20), which would place Jochebed with her brother, Kohath, at the entrance of the Israelites into Egypt. Thus, she would have to be at

⁹ Some theologians propose that there were two Amrams. One was the immediate son of Kohath and the head of the Amramite clan, while the other was the immediate father of Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. Even with this proposal, there are still gaps in the Exodus 6 genealogy.

least 350 years old when she gave birth to Moses if there were no gaps in the Mosaic genealogies!

Based on this evidence, we recognize that many generations separate Amram and Jochebed and their children, Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. In Exodus 6:20 and Numbers 26:59, Jochebed is said to “bear” (“begat,” *yalad*) them while 1 Chronicles 6:3 and 23:13 describe them as “sons” (*ben*). Thus, both “son” (*ben*) and “begat” (*yalad*) are used synonymously here to refer to a distant descendent in a genealogy.

In conclusion, we find that the Mosaic genealogies are highly telescoped (perhaps 20 to 40 percent complete). Only critical names—those corresponding to his tribe (Levi), division (Kohath), and clan (Amram)—are given; the remaining names between Amram and Moses are ignored. Both the term “son” (*ben*) and “begat” (*yalad*) are applied interchangeably to the relationship between Amram and Moses, yet at least eight generations separate the two men (i.e., *ben* and *yalad* are used to mean ancestor rather than immediate son). This genealogy is highly telescoped, yet the genealogy itself does not indicate if it is complete or where gaps are. Only by cross-referencing other Scripture verses or looking at historical sources were we able to determine whether or not the genealogy was telescoped.

The Genesis Genealogies

In most cases it’s not very controversial that many (or even most) biblical genealogies are telescoped. However, the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 differ in at least one respect. We see the repeated formula, “When *X* had lived *Y* years, he became the father of (i.e. ‘begat’, *yalad*) *Z*” (NIV), rather than simply “*X* was the father of *Y*” or “*X* the son of *Y*” as we see elsewhere in the Bible. So, some argue that our conclusions about other biblical genealogies may not apply to Genesis 5 and 11. Those holding Ussher’s chronology estimate that Adam and Eve were created around 6,000 years ago based on the assumption that the Genesis genealogies are complete (see Table 6, Genesis Genealogies). Nothing in the text, however, requires that these genealogies be complete. Bible scholars who hold that the genealogies are telescoped would place the creation of Adam and Eve at around 10 to 30,000 years ago but perhaps as late as 60,000 years ago.¹⁰ Some have tried to push the genealogies so far back that they suggest Adam and Eve might have been Neanderthals (or *Homo erectus* or australopithecines); however, this claim is unsupported and so is rejected by the vast majority of Bible scholars. But who’s right? What should we conclude about these genealogies?

In the example of the Mosaic genealogies (above), it was possible to be very firm in our conclusions due to the abundance of biblical and historical details surrounding these events. The opposite is true for the Genesis genealogies. From the time of Abraham on, there is widespread consensus regarding dates and chronology. However, for the time period before Abraham, which is covered by the Genesis genealogies, there is very little biblical or historical information on which to build solid chronological details. Without such supporting information, we would do well to tread lightly and avoid being dogmatic about our conclusions. Still, while we can’t be conclusive in regards to the nature of the Genesis genealogies, there are a number of points that can be made.

¹⁰ The maximum age of 60,000 years ago is based on the genealogies being no less than 10 percent complete (i.e., 1 in 10 names reported). This limit is based on studies of the estimated degree of completeness of other biblical genealogies, such as the ones described in this paper.

1) Examining biblical genealogies shows that ancient genealogies are generally telescoped rather than complete. Unlike modern readers, ancient readers were concerned with ancestry rather than the number of generations and so would generally not assume that a given genealogy was complete. Therefore, the burden of proof lies on those who hold that the Genesis genealogies are complete rather than the reverse.

2) Many, perhaps most, of the early church fathers held to a recent date for the creation of Adam, and hence held that the genealogies were complete (or nearly complete). However, their basis for this conclusion had little to do with the genealogies themselves. There was a widespread belief that all of human history (from Adam to the return of Christ) would last exactly 6,000 years and could be used as a basis for predicting Christ's return. This interpretation is no longer accepted today, yet it had a strong influence on how the early church fathers interpreted the Genesis genealogies. Similarly, the dependence of the early church fathers on Greek and Latin translations of the Old Testament, rather than the original Hebrew, also led to a faulty understanding of these genealogies. (For more details see *The Genesis Genealogies in Early Jewish and Christian Writings* below.)

3) In Scripture, lists of numbers or names that are intended to be summed are typically followed by a total. For example, the census of each of the tribes of Israel given in Numbers 1 includes a grand total in verse 46. Another example is the genealogical listing of Jacob's children and grandchildren as they prepare to move to Egypt (Genesis 46). After listing all of the names, we are told that the total number of individuals involved is 70 (Genesis 46:27). If Moses had intended the ages at fatherhood in Genesis 5 and 11 to be summed then he would have listed the total amount of time spanned. This feature is noticeably absent. Moreover, nowhere in all of Scripture is there any indication that these genealogies could be used as the basis of a chronology.

4) Henry Morris argues, "The record [of Genesis 5] is *perfectly natural and straightforward* and is *obviously intended* to give both the necessary genealogical data to denote the promised lineage and also the only reliable chronological framework we have for the antediluvian period of history" (emphasis mine).¹¹ As we have observed, biblical genealogies are certainly not "obvious" or "straightforward" in the way that Morris and many others argue. Moreover, Morris' statement significantly contradicts what he wrote with John C. Whitcomb some 15 years earlier.¹² In that work, they included an appendix devoted to showing why the Genesis genealogies are probably not complete. To support their conclusion, they presented eight lines of evidence:

- (1) The number of years is not totaled.
- (2) The name and years of Cainan do not appear in the Hebrew text.
- (3) Genesis 5 and 11 are perfectly symmetrical in form.
- (4) Information is given concerning each patriarch, which is irrelevant to a strict chronology.

¹¹ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 154.

¹² John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1961), Appendix II, 474–89.

- (5) The postdiluvian patriarchs could not have been contemporaries of Abraham.
- (6) The Bible implies a great antiquity for the Tower of Babel.
- (7) The Messianic links were seldom firstborn sons.
- (8) The term “begat” sometimes refers to ancestral relationships.

Most of these arguments are identical to ones I have presented here. To be fair, Morris and Whitcomb clearly state that the gaps are real but limited—no more than 5,000 years between Noah and Abraham.¹³

5) If the presence of personal biographical information, specifically the age at fatherhood, is not for the purpose of establishing a chronological framework (as Morris suggested in the previous point), what then is the purpose of this information? Again, we have to develop our understanding based on a systematic study of biblical genealogies. A study on the inclusion of the age at death in genealogies reveals a distinct trend: it is included only if it is exceptional, specifically if it is 100 years or more. This trend is not surprising, since old age is a sign of blessedness. Inclusion of age at fatherhood seems to follow the same trend, i.e., it is included if it is truly exceptional. (A note of caution must be made here. The age at fatherhood is consistent with the trend, but we cannot be definitive because there are so few examples.) Both the age at fatherhood and the age at death are certainly exceptional for all the individuals included in the Genesis genealogies.

6) The Mosaic genealogies share a large number of similarities with the Genesis genealogies, yet they contain a large gap between Amram and Moses. Points of similarity include: (a) the genealogy bridging a large span of time between important biblical figures; (b) using “begat” (*yalad*) to connect generations; and (c) inclusion of personal details, such as age at death. Therefore, none of these features of the Genesis genealogies can be used to argue for the genealogies being complete.

7) Both Genesis 5 and 11 use the verb “begat” to connect one generation to the next. In Exodus 6:20 and Numbers 26:59, this same verb connects Amram and his wife, Jochebed, to Moses even though there are many generations between them. (Genesis 46 likewise demonstrates that “begat” can refer to non-immediate descendents.) Together, these verses demonstrate that “begat” can be genuinely used in precisely the way suggested for the Genesis genealogies.

Conclusion

Understanding the Genesis genealogies requires a systematic understanding of the nature, style, and purpose of genealogies in the Bible. Even a cursory study of biblical genealogies shows that biblical genealogies are very different from their modern counterparts. Looking closer, we find that biblical genealogies are commonly telescoped by leaving out less important names and that it is usually impossible to tell if a genealogy is complete simply by looking at it. While genealogies are typically skimmed over or ignored by most people, the Genesis genealogies have generated controversy because of their supposed connection to the age of the

¹³ Ibid. 489.

universe and the creation of man. The interpretation that the Genesis genealogies are telescoped and that Adam and Eve were created a few tens of thousands of years ago is no less a literal interpretation of Scripture than Ussher's interpretation. Many prominent conservative theologians (see below) support this position.

Prominent Conservative Theologians Who Hold that the Genesis Genealogies Are Telescoped:¹⁴

William Henry Green, "Primeval Chronology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April 1890), 285–303.

B. B. Warfield, "On the Antiquity and Unity of the Human Race," reprinted in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (P & R, 1968), 238–61.

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 40–41.

James Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, Part 2, Chapter 4.

R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 147–52.

Francis Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*.

Reference Material:

NIV = *New International Version* of the Holy Bible

Vine's = W. E. Vine, M. F. Unger, W. White, Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996)

HGKSB = S. Zodhiates, *Hebrew Greek Key Study Bible* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1988)

Hebrew word references in parenthesis are keyed to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible with Greek and Hebrew Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Regal, 1966).

For Further Reference:

NIV Study Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), "Introduction to 1 Chronicles: Genealogies" and footnotes on Genesis 4:17–18, 5:5, 11:10–26; 1 Chronicles 6:4–15, 7:20–29; Daniel 5:1; Matthew 1:5, 8, 11, 12, 17; Acts 7:6.

Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 267–70.

Norman Geisler and Norman Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1992), 38–39.

Hugh Ross, *Fingerprint of God*, 2nd ed. (Orange, CA: Promise Publishing, 1989), 159.

Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 26–27.

Hugh Ross, *Genesis Question* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999), 54–55, 107–10.

¹⁴ "Are There Gaps in the Biblical Genealogies?" Reasons To Believe, <http://www.reasons.org/are-there-gaps-biblical-genealogies>, (accessed June 16, 2010).

Cainan—An Extra Name in Genesis 11?

In his gospel, Luke presents the genealogy of Jesus back to Adam (Luke 3:23–38). (See Table 2, Luke’s Genealogy.) This genealogy precisely follows the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 with one exception—Luke inserts Cainan, son of Arphaxad (Luke 3:36).¹⁵ This name is sometimes referred to as the “second Cainan” to distinguish him from Cainan (or Kenan), son of Enosh, who is also found in Luke’s genealogy (Luke 3:37; Genesis 5:12).

According to Luke, we should find this second Cainan listed between Arphaxad (Genesis 11:12) and Shelah (Genesis 11:14), but his name is notably absent from all our Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament.¹⁵ Nor is it found in the Samaritan Pentateuch, Syrian Pentateuch, the Aramaic Targums, or the Vulgate.¹⁵ It is also absent from our earliest copies of the Greek Septuagint, and early Jewish and Christian writers prior to the third century who made use of it likewise do not include this name.¹⁶

Given that Cainan, son of Arphaxad, is clearly missing from Genesis 11, what are we to make of his inclusion in Luke? The most straightforward explanation is that this Cainan is genuine but was omitted because the Genesis 11 genealogy was shortened (telescoped), leaving out less-important names. If the Genesis genealogies need not be complete, then perhaps many more names could have been left out of these listings. In that case, attempts to date backwards to Adam and Eve using these genealogies would be seriously flawed and would give a much-too-recent date.

This proposal has not gone unchallenged. For example, Henry Morris argues that the extra name in Luke’s genealogy is not authentic.¹⁷ He proposes that an early copyist of Luke’s gospel—rather than Luke himself—is responsible for this error and provides two possible explanations for how this might have happened. His first scenario is that the copyist may have accidentally duplicated Cainan (son of Enosh) from the very next verse. This type of scribal error was not uncommon because ancient manuscripts did not contain spaces or punctuation making it easy for the eye to focus on the wrong place.¹⁵ If Morris’ theory is correct, then this would bring Luke’s genealogy into alignment with Genesis and leave open the possibility that Genesis 5 and 11 are complete.

Morris’ theory is plausible because, while the majority of our manuscripts of Luke’s gospel have this second Cainan, there are two that do not. P⁷⁵ (AD 175–225) belongs to the Bodmer collection and is the earliest extant copy of Luke’s gospel.¹⁵ Codex Bezae (also known as Codex Cantabrigiensis and Manuscript D^{ea}; fifth or sixth century) is of a later date and for Luke 3 has an inverted form of Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus, so is a poor witness for this question.¹⁸ However, the two manuscripts without the extra Cainan could also be the result of

¹⁵ Eric Lyons, “Was Cainan the Son of Arphaxad?” Apologetics Press, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/580>, (accessed June 12, 2010).

¹⁶ Josephus (*The Antiquities of the Jews* 1.6.4–5), Theophilus of Antioch (*To Autolytus* 3.24), and Julius Africanus (*Chronology*, Fragment 6) do not include the extra-Cainan. Hippolytus (*Refutation of All Heresies* 10.26) in the third century is the first to recognize it.

¹⁷ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 281–82. His rejection here of the extra-Cainan in Luke is opposite of his previous statements that took its presence as evidence that Genesis 5 and 11 were telescoped (John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1961), Appendix II, 475).

¹⁸ *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Codex Bezae,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Bezae (accessed June 12, 2010).

scribal error or attempts to fit Luke's genealogy to the Hebrew of Genesis (which does not contain it), so it is hard to know which one contains the error and which does not.

Morris' second theory is that one of Luke's copyists inserted the second Cainan based on their familiarity with very late copies of the Septuagint. (Our earliest and best copies of the Septuagint do not contain the extra Cainan, but some later copies do.) While this could be true, it is far more likely that the Septuagint was altered to fit Luke's gospel rather than the reverse. This conclusion is based on the observation that the changes to the Septuagint appear to be too extensive to have been accidental. First, when the second Cainan does appear in these late manuscripts, it appears in not one but three locations—Genesis 11:12 and two related genealogies, Genesis 10:24 and 1 Chronicles 1:24.¹⁹ Second, the insertion at Genesis 11:12 involves more than just a name (as in the case of Luke 3) but rather two full sentences. The ages at fatherhood and death have been added so that this entry follows the pattern of the other figures. Third, during the early church period the Septuagint was largely maintained by Christians who would have been tempted to change it to match Luke's genealogy.²⁰ Given all this, we can reasonably rule out the idea that the extra Cainan in Luke came from the Septuagint.

Yet another possibility is that Luke took the name from the *Book of Jubilees* (second century BC).²¹ *Jubilees* is an early Jewish writing that reiterates large portions of Genesis and Exodus but is embellished with various legends and traditional lore. *Jubilees* 8.1–2 explicitly lists Cainan, son of Arphaxad. Its early date makes it an intriguing candidate for the source of this extra name; however, there are a number of reasons that make this unlikely. First, the original *Jubilees* in Hebrew has been lost except for fragments found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Our primary manuscripts of this text are fifteenth- and sixth-century copies of a sixth-century Ethiopic translation of the book. So while *Jubilees* itself may have been written very early, Cainan could have been added long after it first appeared in Luke's gospel. Like the Septuagint, the Ethiopic *Jubilees* was translated and maintained by Christians rather than Jews, so it is very likely it would have been altered to match Luke. Second, *Jubilees* 2.23 states that there were 22 generations from Adam to Jacob.²² If we exclude the extra Cainan, this number corresponds to 10 generations from Adam to Noah (Genesis 5) and 10 generations from Noah to Abraham (Genesis 11), plus Isaac and Jacob. The most likely explanation for this is that it reflects an original *Jubilees* that did not include the extra Cainan, but the later copyists who would have inserted Cainan simply failed to update this number accordingly.

There is one final argument that may be worth considering. When ancient Hebrew genealogies were telescoped, the number of names was typically reduced to 10 or a multiple of 7. The genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 have 10 names each, which is consistent with this practice (although that does not actually prove they were telescoped). Luke's genealogy, in contrast, follows multiples of 7: Adam to Abraham (21 names), Abraham to David (14 names), David to the exile (21 names), and exile to Jesus (21 names). From Adam to Abraham, Luke gives 21 names compared to 20 in Genesis 5 and 11. This suggests Luke could have added Cainan in order to extend the 20 names to 21 in order to achieve a multiple of 7. This line of reasoning provides a plausible reason why Luke might want to include one more name—to achieve a multiple of 7. This does not, however, explain where he might have obtained this name. So, as intriguing as this argument is, it falls short of real proof.

Unfortunately, we cannot definitively resolve this curious question at this time. The best that can be done is to simply summarize some of the more likely possibilities.

¹⁹ The second Cainan would be expected to appear also in 1 Chronicles 1:18 but it is absent even in the Septuagint.

²⁰ Originally, Greek-speaking Jews maintained the Septuagint, but they later abandoned it as it grew in popularity among Christians. Christian copyists were not as scrupulous as the Jews in maintaining the text.

²¹ *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Jubilees," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jubilees> (accessed June 12, 2010).

²² The symbolic significance of 22 generations is that it corresponds to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

- **Cainan is genuine.** Luke correctly included Cainan, and late copies of the Septuagint and *Jubilees* were altered to match. The two copies of Luke missing this name were attempts by copyists to harmonize it with Hebrew manuscripts. This does not, however, explain where Luke obtained this name. Plausible.
- **Luke's Cainan is a scribal error.** The second Cainan in Luke was the result of a copyist error that duplicated the same name from the next verse. The Septuagint and *Jubilees* were subsequently changed to match. Plausible.
- ***Jubilees* is the source of the second Cainan.** *Jubilees* reflects an early variant of the Hebrew text (predating our existing Masoretic texts). Perhaps Cainan was present in these early manuscripts but was subsequently lost. Luke then took the name from *Jubilees* and it was subsequently propagated to the Septuagint. Highly improbable but cannot be strictly ruled out at this time.

Given the uncertainty in the textual data, we should not rely too heavily on this extra Cainan to argue for the incompleteness of Genesis 11. Perhaps future discoveries will settle this question once and for all.

The Genesis Genealogies in Early Jewish and Christian Writings

The writings of the early church fathers have come under increasing scrutiny with regard to how they understood the days of creation, the age of the earth, and Noah's flood. Leaders from all sides of the modern creation debate have pointed to these men to garner support for their own interpretations of Genesis. Sadly, such claims are frequently misleading, overly simplistic, or just plain wrong.

Given the lack of clear and accurate information on this topic, I decided to research it for myself. My original study focused on reading and trying to reconcile what scholars from all sides of the debate have written about this topic. However, I soon realized the only way to get satisfying answers was to actually read the original writings and study the historical context in which these figures lived. I also found it necessary to study early Jewish writings because Christianity was birthed within the matrix of Judaism and many early Christian ideas about Genesis can be directly traced to earlier Jewish traditions.

What I present here is a short synopsis of what these early figures wrote about the Genesis genealogies and the age of the earth. Since my research has not been published, I make frequent reference to a study by Robert Bradshaw that examined what the early church fathers wrote about Genesis 1–11 (up to the death of Augustine in AD 430).²³ His work is readily available and provides additional details that I don't have room to supply here. It should be noted that Bradshaw began his study to support his young-earth creationist view. However, after much study, he found that the views of the early church were complex and represented a "diversity of opinion."²⁴ Although I come from an old-earth view, I find the study of Robert Bradshaw to be an excellent resource for any who are interested in this topic.

Early Statements about the Age of the Earth

Jewish Intertestamental Writings

The earliest non-canonical Jewish writings (c. 500 BC–AD 100) are collectively referred to as the intertestamental (or second temple) writings.²⁵ This is our main source of information on Jewish thought during this very turbulent time in their history. From these writings, we can partially trace the development of Jewish ideas on Genesis and creation up to the birth of the Christian church. Some of these traditions were carried over into the early church and certain of these books were highly regarded by the church fathers.

The first notable work is the *Book of Enoch* (also known as *I Enoch*). This book claims to be revelation given to the biblical Enoch (Genesis 5:18–24) and is among the earliest and most influential of the intertestamental works. Of particular interest is the section known as the Apocalypse of Weeks (*I Enoch* 91:12–27; 93:1–14), which describes God's sovereign plan for

²³ Robert I. Bradshaw, "Creationism and the Early Church," updated January 25, 1999, <http://www.robibradshaw.com/contents.htm> (accessed June 12, 2010).

²⁴ R. Bradshaw, chapter 1.

²⁵ For details, see *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Jewish Apocrypha," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_apocrypha (accessed June 12, 2010) and s.v. "Biblical Apocrypha," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_apocrypha (accessed June 12, 2010).

human history from creation to the new creation in 10 “weeks.”²⁶ These “weeks” seem to be periods of irregular length although one modern commentator contends they are 1000-year periods. (If the latter is true, this would mean the author believed that the world was less than 10,000 years old in his day.)

While *1 Enoch* does not directly address the age of the earth, its apocalyptic idea of God foreordaining an end to the world after a fixed period of time had long-lasting repercussions on how people viewed the Genesis genealogies. The 10-weeks idea of *1 Enoch* was quickly replaced by a new model—the creation week pattern for human history.²⁷ Since God created the world in six days (and rested on the seventh), it reasons the world would last seven apocalyptic “days,” each lasting 1,000 years based on Psalms 90:4.²⁸ The first six “days” were reserved for human history followed by God’s judgment at the end of 6,000 years. The seventh millennium is then identified as a period of rest paralleling the Sabbath (Mishnah, *Tamid* 7.4). Jewish Rabbis further embellished this model by organizing the six millennial days into three ages of 2,000 years each. There would be the age of chaos, the age of the law, and finally the age of the Messiah (Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 97a).

The *Book of the Secrets of Enoch* (or *2 Enoch*) (first century) teaches that the new creation would occur after 7,000 years, which is an early reference to this creation week pattern for human history (*2 Enoch* 33.1). This age limit for the Earth constrained interpretations of Genesis 5 and 11 because it inherently precluded significant gaps in them.

The earliest direct usage of the Genesis genealogies is found in the *Book of Jubilees* (c. 140–100 BC). This pseudepigraphal work claims to be a revelation given to Moses while he was on Mt. Sinai. The book largely follows Genesis and the early chapters of Exodus, but reworks and embellishes those narratives with Jewish tradition and lore. One unique feature of this work is that it gives specific dates for each of the major events it describes. These dates are specified in terms of the number of jubilees (49-year periods),²⁹ “weeks” of years (7-year periods), and years since creation.³⁰ According to this work, the death of Moses occurred at the end of the 50th jubilee, which corresponds to the 2450th year after creation. No information is given for events after that point, so we can only provide an estimate for what year the author believed creation to have occurred. If we assume Moses died in approximately 1500 BC, then creation would have occurred in roughly 3950 BC according to *Jubilees*.

Jubilees deserves a closer examination because it is likely the model for all subsequent attempts to date back to creation. It was written at a time of great upheaval, as the Jews had recently regained their freedom from the Greeks in the Maccabean revolt (166–142 BC). Its main purpose was to strengthen the Jewish spirit to resist the encroachment of Greek Hellenism.³¹ The author was likely a Pharisee who freely reinterpreted the Old Testament to portray the earliest

²⁶ The *Book of Enoch* was composed by multiple authors at different times between about 300 BC and 1 BC. The Apocalypse of Weeks section was probably written between 170–100 BC.

²⁷ R. Bradshaw, chapter 3. See also Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury, eds., *Coming to Grips with Genesis* (Green Forest, AR: Masters Books, 2008), 38–48, where this scheme is referred to as the sex/septa–millenary construct.

²⁸ Psalms 90:4 reads, “For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by” and was used to support the idea of a day equaling a thousand years. Since this psalm is attributed to Moses, it was natural to connect it to the events of Genesis. The early church also appealed to 2 Peter 3:8, which is very similar to Psalms 90:4.

²⁹ The idea of jubilee as 49 years comes from Lev 25:8–55, which teaches that the Year of Jubilee was to be celebrated after seven seven–year land Sabbaths.

³⁰ These dates can be converted into an absolute number of years after creation using a simple formula. Let us take as an example the confusion of tongues at the tower of Babel in Shinar: “In the fourth week [of years] in the first year in the beginning thereof in the four and thirtieth jubilee, were they dispersed from the land of Shinar” (*Jubilees* 10.27). Understanding jubilees as 49-year periods and weeks as 7-year periods, we compute $(34-1)*49 + (4-1)*7+1 = 1639$. So, according to *Jubilees*, this event took place in the year 1639 AM (i.e. after creation).

³¹ R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2 (Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press, 2004), 1–10.

patriarchs as rigorously following the law. He also attempted to answer questions and fill in details not explicitly laid out in Scripture, such as where Cain got his wife. All of this necessitated going beyond the literal text of Genesis. Moreover, *Jubilees* explicitly drew from the earlier *1 Enoch* (*Jubilees* 21.10) and so would have been influenced by its apocalyptic ideas. Given these considerations, *Jubilees* is not the best model for how we should understand Genesis or the age of the earth.

4 Esdras (c. AD 100) proves another estimate for the age of the earth, albeit indirectly. (This work is sometimes referred to as *2 Esdras*. Esdras is Latin for Ezra.) It reports that Solomon built the first Jewish temple “after three thousand years” (*4 Esdras* 10.45–46). If we take 970–930 BC as the time when Solomon lived, then Adam (or creation) would have been around 4000 BC.

Early Jewish Writers

Philo is the first of the two great Jewish scholars of the first century. He directly rejected attempts to date backwards to creation because he believed the events of creation took place before the beginning of time (*Allegorical Interpretations* 1.2). That is, he held that time was marked by the movement of the heavenly bodies, which he understood as being created on the fourth day—after the initial events of creation. He likewise understood Genesis 2:4 as teaching that God created in “indeterminate time not accurately described” (*Questions and Answers on Genesis* 1.1). While Philo provides the most extensive discussion of Genesis in ancient history, nowhere does he give an estimate for the age of the earth. Nor does he comment on the Genesis genealogies even though he discusses almost every other section of Genesis.

The other great Jewish scholar is the historian Josephus. In his epic work, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, he gives the history of the Jewish people up to his day (using both biblical and secular sources). He does briefly make use of the Genesis genealogies (*Antiquities* 1.2.3–1.3.4; 1.6.1–5) but does not give any indication of gaps, although he does not rule them out either. He also provides a chronology beginning at creation. We find this information in the headers of each of the 20 books of his *Antiquities*, where he gives time spans for the events described. If we sum these values, we get 5,781 ½ years from creation to the start of the Jewish revolt in AD 66, which gives us 5717 BC as the date of creation. Unfortunately, he does not explain how he derived his estimate for the earliest time span—3,833 years from creation to the death of Isaac (*Antiquities* header 1).

One conundrum posed by this calculation is that it does not match statements found elsewhere in his writings. He declares that history covered 5,000 years (*Antiquities* preface 3; *Against Apion* 1.1). He further writes that the time from the “origin of mankind” to the death of Moses was a little short of 3,000 years (*Against Apion* 1.8). An additional 2,000 years was said to have passed from Moses to his own day (*Antiquities* preface 3; *Against Apion* 1.7). These references give a consistent picture of around 5,000 years for the age of the earth, which differs from the approximately 5,700 years based on the headers of *Antiquities*. What are we to make of this? One solution that has been offered is that the 3,833 years to the death of Isaac is a copyist error and should be reduced by 1,100 years.³² This would place his estimate for creation around 4,600 BC.

A third influential Jewish source is the Jewish calendar, which assigns Sunday, September 6, 3761 BC as the day when God created the world. This calendar was very important in Jewish life since it was used to date important religious holidays, such as Passover, and is still used today. This calendar was based on a lunisolar system in which the lunar calendar is periodically adjusted to keep up with the solar calendar and these adjustments are carefully chosen so that these religious holidays do not conflict with Sabbath days. The creation date

³² William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus* (Peabody, MA: Hendricks Publishers, Inc, 1987), 859–860.

assumes that the Genesis genealogies are complete and the creation “days” are 24-hour periods, hence one could work backwards from Abraham to Adam to calculate the year. The specific day of the year was derived from assuming that the beginning of the New Year (Rosh Hashanah) corresponded to the autumn equinox. It should be noted, however, that the Jewish calendar was not formally adopted in its current form until Hillel II in AD 359. Therefore, we should be cautious about extrapolating this interpretation back to earlier centuries.

Early Christian Writings

The authors of the New Testament are notably silent on the age of the earth. Justin Martyr (second century) may be the first church father to touch upon this issue. He wrote that Jesus was predicted by earlier prophets, including one 5,000 years before (*First Apology* 31). Some take this to be a reference to Adam and hence an estimate for the age of humanity. However, he is silent on the length of the days of creation, so we cannot be certain of how old he actually believed the earth to be.

The *Epistle of Barnabas* (second century) was written by an unknown Alexandrian named Barnabas. This Barnabas was sometimes incorrectly identified with the biblical Barnabas and so this letter was considered highly authoritative in the early church. He writes that “the Lord will finish all things in six thousand years” (*Epistle of Barnabas* 15). From this, we can infer that he believed the world was less than 6,000 years old. This statement represents the first definitive usage of the creation week pattern for human history in the Christian church. He connects God creating in six days (Genesis 2:2) with Psalms 90:4²⁸ to arrive at six thousand years. The great church father Irenaeus (second century) taught the same creation week pattern, although he does not explicitly mention the six thousand years (*Against Heresies* 5.28.3). Both of these individuals are silent on the Genesis genealogies, so we cannot be certain how they viewed them.

Justin Martyr’s student Theophilus of Antioch (second century) is the first to clearly attempt to compute the time back to creation. (Archbishop Ussher in the seventeenth century would later credit him as being the father of modern biblical chronology.) We find his calculation in *To Autolycus*, a letter written to his nonbelieving friend. Theophilus used the Genesis genealogies to compute the time from Adam to Abraham by summing the ages at fatherhood (*To Autolycus* 3.24). He then used biblical sources to work his way down to King Cyrus and then switched to various historical sources to extend it down to his own day, concluding that the time from creation to the death of Emperor Markus Aurelius was 5,698 years (*To Autolycus* 3.28). Since Aurelius died in AD 180, this placed the creation at around 5510 BC.

Theophilus’ effort to calculate the age of the earth was primarily driven by apologetic concerns. His work reveals his key focus was to:

- **Demonstrate the antiquity of Christianity.** Many Greeks challenged Christianity by arguing it was new and hence not worthy of serious consideration. Theophilus counters this by demonstrating that Moses, Solomon, and the Prophets wrote prior to the Greek writers (*To Autolycus* 3.21–23, 29). In fact, he argued that some portions of Greek philosophy were actually plagiarized from Scripture (*To Autolycus* 1.14), which is known as the “theft of the Greeks” argument.³³ This established Christianity as superior to Greek thought.
- **Demonstrate the historical reliability of Scripture.** Having demonstrated that Scripture predates Greek writings, it followed that it should be trusted over Greek accounts of ancient events. For example, the Greeks had their own version of the flood (two local

³³ R. Bradshaw, chapter 3. Table 3.1 lists early church fathers who used this “theft of the Greeks” argument, including Justin Martyr, Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius.

floods) and so Theophilus argued that the biblical account of the flood should be taken as the more reliable because it is older (*To Autolytus* 3.17–19). He specifically argues that the data given for the events prior to Noah’s flood (i.e., the Genesis genealogies) are specifically intended to provide chronological information (*To Autolytus* 3.23).

- **Refute Greek materialism.** The prevailing Greek view of the universe was that it was eternal and uncreated (*To Autolytus* 2.4, 3.26), or at least extremely ancient (*To Autolytus* 3.16, 26). After finishing his calculations, he notes that even if he was off by as much as 200 years, the world would still be younger than the ages taught by the Greeks (*To Autolytus* 3.29).³⁴ His emphasis on a recent creation was primarily focused on supporting the biblical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* (i.e., creation “out of nothing”) in opposition to the Greek eternal (uncreated) universe.

The result of this is that he was constrained to view the genealogies as being complete because any uncertainties or gaps undermined his apologetic goals. For example, Theophilus takes the periods given in the book of Judges as strictly consecutive (no overlap) and simply adds up the values (*To Autolytus* 3.25), but modern scholars recognize this assumption is probably not true. So, the need for simplicity and precision in these chronologies came at the expense of biblical accuracy. These considerations certainly played a similar role in subsequent chronological attempts.

The next major figure to give a chronology was Clement of Alexandria (third century) in his *Miscellaneous* (or *Stromata*) 1.21. Like Theophilus, his interest in constructing a chronology was to show that Moses and the prophets lived long before Greek authors and thus some of the meaningful aspects of Greek philosophy were plagiarized from Hebrew Scripture. Most of his effort focused on calculating the time starting from Moses, rather than Adam. He does not directly discuss the Genesis genealogies but does provide a span of time for this period: 2,148 years and 4 days from Adam to Noah’s flood and another 1,250 years from Shem to Abraham. Putting all of the pieces together, he arrived at 5,784 years, 2 months, and 12 days from Adam to Emperor Commodus. Given that Commodus died in AD 192 that gives 5592 BC as the year Adam was created. Because these values are similar to those given by Theophilus, it suggests that Clement likewise held that the genealogies were complete.

The next example comes from Commodianus (third century), who wrote that the world would end after 6,000 years (*Instructions* 35, 80). This is based on the creation week pattern for human history discussed previously. Since the end had not yet come in his day, then creation could not have been older than about 5700 BC. His interpretation is very similar to that of Pseudo-Barnabas and Irenaeus but less detailed.

Hippolytus of Rome (third century) does briefly list the generations between Noah and Abraham (Genesis 11) without any hint of gaps (*Refutation of All Heresies* 10.26). (But, this does not necessarily mean he believed there were no gaps.) In a fragment of one of his commentaries, he specifically states that there were 5,500 years between Adam and Christ (*Commentary on Daniel* 2.4–6). The context of his statement is an interpretation of Daniel’s visions (Daniel 2, 7, and 8).

Hippolytus’ support for this date is drawn from an allegorical interpretation of three different verses and a belief that Christ would return in six thousand years based on the creation week pattern for human history. First, he interprets Revelation 17:10 (“Five [kings] have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come”) as allegorically referring to millennia, believing he was

³⁴ Theophilus does specifically recognize that most of the Old Testament ages do not include days and months and so this information is not precise enough to calculate back to the exact year. Sadly, this observation was largely ignored by later writers.

living between the fifth and sixth millennia. Second, he interprets the sum of the dimensions of the Ark of the Covenant (5 ½ cubits in Exodus 25:10) as marking 5 ½ millennia to Christ.³⁵ Third, he interprets the words “now is the sixth hour” (John 19:14), as corresponding to a half day or 500 years (i.e., half of a millennial “day”). We cannot be certain where Hippolytus originally derived his estimate of 5,500 years, since he never addressed this in his extant writings. However, his conclusion is in broad agreement with Theophilus’ calculation so that may have been his source of information.

The next person to develop a chronology is Julius Africanus (third century). Unfortunately, we only have fragments of his five books on *Chronology* where he addresses this. In fragments 3 and 6, he does list the ages at fatherhood given in Genesis 5 and 11. Then in fragments 5 and 8, he reports that 2,262 years passed from Adam to Noah and another 1,015 years to Abraham. He totals this to give 3,277 years and 20 generations from Adam to Abraham (fragment 8). After more work, he concludes that 5,531 years passed from Adam to Jesus Christ (*Chronology* Fragment 1; 18.4). In the first fragment, he contrasts this estimate with those of the Egyptians (8 or 9 thousand years), the Phoenicians (30,000 years), and the Chaldeans (480,000 years). Having an age significantly younger than those of the surrounding nations served as a convenient tool to distance Christian beliefs from pagan ones.

The great church scholar Origen (third century) addressed the age of the earth indirectly in his *Against Celsus*. This was in response to a critical work written by Celsus (a pagan philosopher, second century) who followed popular Greek thinking that the universe was eternal and uncreated and so ridiculed the Genesis 1 creation account. Origen methodically countered each of Celsus’ statements and twice stated that the world “is not yet ten thousand years old” (*Against Celsus* 1.19–20). Most likely he held that the world was under 6,000 years old in line with popular belief of his day but we cannot be certain of that. Nowhere does he address the Genesis genealogies themselves or explain the basis of this estimate. Looking at the context of his statements, Origen’s primary point is to argue that the world is young to counter Celsus’ belief in an eternal universe. So, it is a belief that the universe was created that was essential, not the actual age of the earth.

Cyprian (third century) in his short treatise *Exhortation to Martyrdom* does make one rather enigmatic statement of interest. He reports that, “As the first seven days in the divine arrangement containing seven thousand of years...” (*Exhortation* 11). It is possible that this means that he understood the days of creation as being periods of 1,000 years each but this seems highly unlikely. The seven thousand years better fits the creation week pattern for human history, which was very popular in the early church. This conclusion is further reinforced by his comment, “six thousand years are now nearly completed since the devil first attacked man” (*Exhortation* Preface 2), a reference to the serpent’s temptation of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3). This indicates that he believed that he was living near the end of the sixth millennia of human history.

Later writers largely followed along the lines of earlier ones. Methodius (fourth century) very clearly teaches the creation week pattern for human history and believed the world would end after seven thousand years (*Banquet of the Ten Virgins* 9.1; *On Things Created*, Fragment 9). The great church historian Eusebius (fourth century) developed an extensive chronology and concluded that creation took place around 5228 BC (*Chronicle*).³⁶ Lactantius (fourth century) argues that “the six thousandth year is not yet completed” (*The Divine Institutes* 7.14), a reference to the creation week pattern for human history. This is a direct rebuke of

³⁵ Many in the early church saw the details of the Old Testament as figuratively pointing to Jesus. Here he saw the Ark as symbolic of Jesus Christ (R. Bradshaw, chapter 1).

³⁶ R. Bradshaw, chapter 3.

“philosophers, who enumerate thousands of ages from the beginning of the world.” At the same time, he integrated the creation week pattern into his discourse on the events of the end times where it served to predict Christ’s return as immanent (*The Divine Institutes* 7.14–26). Victorinus’ (fourth century) *On the Creation of the World* does not give an age for the earth but does discuss the creation week pattern for human history. The emphasis in his writing was the symbolic meaning of numbers in Genesis rather than a literal interpretation of the text.

The final noteworthy figure is Augustine (fifth century). Of all the early church fathers, he is by far the most important and had the greatest impact on later theology. With regard to the age of the earth, he largely followed along the lines of Origen. Both men interpreted Genesis 1 allegorically and viewed the creation days as being instantaneous. Nevertheless, like Origen, he indicates that less than six thousand years had passed since Adam was created (*The City of God* 12.12). As with so many church fathers, this conclusion is based on the creation week pattern for human history. He does make one statement, however, where he declares that 2,262 years passed between Adam and the flood (*The City of God* 15.20). This seems to indicate that he held at least the Genesis 5 genealogy to be complete. It is not clear, however, if this estimate was his own work or if it came from someone else.

(These findings are summarized in tabular form in Table 8
Early Statements Concerning the Age of the Humanity.)

A Closer Look

So, what are we to conclude from what early Jewish and Christian writers taught about the Genesis genealogies and the age of the earth? Clearly, many of these figures held that the earth was very young—less than 6,000 years old. In fact, no one taught that Adam and Eve lived farther back than 10,000 years. Only Philo seems to have openly rejected attempts to assign a date for creation, but we have no way of knowing whether he might have been open to gaps in the genealogies or an old earth. Do these findings support the contention that the Genesis genealogies can be used to develop an age for the Earth?

To answer this, we need to delve a bit deeper into the basis for these views. If the early writers were influenced by factors exterior to the Biblical text, it would diminish the authority of their conclusions. While they were free from modern influences, it does not mean they could approach these genealogies without any biases or preconceived notions. Thus, any meaningful study of these early figures must examine the environment in which they made their interpretations.

Dependence on Translations

The single greatest factor influencing early Christian views of the Genesis genealogies is a lack of knowledge of the Hebrew language. According to Bradshaw, only 2 out of 23 early church fathers he studied (Jerome and Theodore of Mopsuestia) were fluent in Hebrew and both lived in the fourth/fifth century.³⁷ Prior to that, only Origen seems to have undertaken a study in Hebrew, although he was never fluent in it. As a result, the early church was almost entirely dependent upon Greek and Latin translations for their understanding of the days of creation, the Genesis genealogies, and Noah’s flood. In addition, the early church had little connection with Jewish culture or traditional views of Genesis, so their views were filtered through the lens of Greek and Latin.

The primary Greek translation of the Old Testament in their day was the Septuagint. Work on it started c. 282 BC and it was quickly adopted by Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jews. The Septuagint was used by many Jewish writers (including Philo and Josephus) but it had the greatest influence on the early church. Latin-speaking Christians relied on a variety of Latin

³⁷ R. Bradshaw, chapter 1. Information taken from Table 1.1.

translations of the Septuagint. (Note that these represent translations of a translation.) The Septuagint was often considered to be an inspired translation and so was treated as being of greater authority than the Hebrew original. Thus, many failed to question the translated text even when it led to obvious problems.³⁸ As Bradshaw points out, modern scholars have a distinct edge over the early church fathers in regard to using the original Hebrew.³⁹

In the fifth century, Jerome produced a new and authoritative vernacular Latin translation—the Vulgate—based on the Hebrew. Jerome’s masterpiece would be the authorized text of the Bible for the next millennia. Like the Septuagint, it was often treated as an inspired translation that was beyond challenge, so believers had little reason to look at the actual Hebrew. It was not until the Protestant Reformation (sixteenth and seventeenth century) that there was a renewed interest in studying the Bible in its original languages; however, by that time interpretations of Genesis based on the Greek or Latin texts were well entrenched. Common language translations were also becoming readily available at that time, so most people continued to study the Old Testament in a language other than Hebrew.

What difference does it make that most of the church fathers relied on translations of Genesis? There are at least three major ways that ancient Hebrew differs from Greek, Latin, and English that must be considered:

- **Small vocabulary.** Because ancient Hebrew has few words compared to Greek, Latin, English, and other modern languages, each word will generally correspond to multiple English ones.⁴⁰ As such, translations subtly imply that the text is far more specific and narrow than the Hebrew. The Hebrew genealogical terms—*ben* (“son”), *ab* (“father”), and *yalad* (“begat”)—are classic examples of this as discussed in the main part of this paper.
- **Hebrew does not have verb tense.** Verbs in ancient Hebrew primarily communicate an action as being finished or unfinished.⁴⁰ Sometimes ancient Hebrew uses word order or other constructions to help convey sequence information that is not supplied directly by the verb. Modern languages, in contrast, have a plethora of verb tenses to communicate the “when” of an action. As a result, English translations are generally more time specific than the Hebrew necessitates. This means that translations can subtly introduce assumptions about the duration and time ordering of verbal actions. Confusion among the early church fathers over when the sun, moon, and stars were created (Genesis 1:14–19) demonstrates this problem.⁴¹
- **Genealogies have a large cultural component.** In ancient times, genealogies were primarily intended to transmit lineage.⁴² Consequently, ancient Hebrew genealogies (containing more than 4 names) were almost always telescoped. This differs from our own experiences because genealogies today are treated as precise historical statements.

³⁸ “Differences between the Latin Vulgate, the Greek Septuagint and the Hebrew text of Genesis also caused Augustine problems. How, for instance, can one explain how Methuselah lived 14 years after the flood (according to the Latin translation)? For him the answer was simple – the Septuagint translation was wrong. For some pious believers questioning the translation was beyond the pale. The text *must* be right – so Methuselah must have been snatched up to be with Enoch during the flood, and then set down again when it was over! Augustine agrees with Jerome that the Hebrew text gives the correct reading for according to it Methuselah died in the year the flood came. He rules that on difficult textual points the Hebrew text should be taken as the final authority.” (R. Bradshaw, chapter 1, emphasis original)

³⁹ R. Bradshaw, chapter 1.

⁴⁰ R. Whitefield, *Reading Genesis One*, (San Jose, CA: Rodney Whitefield Publisher, 2003), 2–15.

⁴¹ R. Whitefield, 104. R. Whitefield, “The Fourth Creative ‘Day’ of Genesis,”

<http://www.creationingenesis.com/TheFourthCreativeDay.pdf> (accessed June 12, 2010).

⁴² *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), “Introduction to 1 Chronicles: Genealogies.”

As such, we tend to resist the idea that the Genesis genealogies could be telescoped, projecting our own cultural assumptions onto the text.

This explains why attempts to construct chronologies with the Genesis genealogies did not appear until after the introduction of the Greek Septuagint and the influence of Greek culture.

Individual Bible translations played yet another role in shaping interpretations of Genesis. Unlike Scripture itself, translations are not divinely inspired and so may contain errors, omissions, and other faults. Because of this, readers using them may come to different conclusions than they would have if they had used the Hebrew original. In most cases the effects are minor, such as when both Philo and Origen wrote, based on the Septuagint, that Noah's ark was shaped like a pyramid (instead of a boat).⁴³

Here are few examples to demonstrate how translations affected people's interpretations of Genesis 1–11:

- **The Sons of God/Giants—Translator Bias.** Genesis 6:1–4 states that the “sons of God” had children with the “daughters of men.” Historically, the two most popular ways of understanding this passage are that the “sons of God” refers to either angels *or* to the descendants of the godly line of Seth—Adam's son. Some copies of the Septuagint⁴⁴ actually read “angels of God” instead of “sons of God” to make it conform to the popular tradition of the day.⁴⁵ As a result of this alteration, the early church fathers—relying on the Septuagint—exclusively equated the “sons of God” with angels; that is until Julius Africanus in the mid-third century.⁴⁶ A second example can be found in this same passage where the Septuagint translated Nephilim (literally “fallen ones”) as “giants” (Greek *gigantes*).⁴⁷ As a result, the view that the Nephilim were “giants” was rampant in the early church.
- **Evening–Morning–Day in Genesis 1—Oversimplification.** At the center of controversy over the days of creation is the evening–morning–day phrase that appears six times in Genesis 1. The King James Version (KJV) renders it, “And the evening and the morning were the Xth day.” This wording actually misrepresents the original Hebrew in multiple ways and in each case lends artificial support for the notion that these are simple solar days. First, the verb (“was”) appears twice in the Hebrew, but the KJV actually leaves out the second occurrence and so reduces it to a simple sentence. The Young's Literal Translation (YLT) correctly reads, “and there is an evening, and there is a morning—day one.” Second, the KJV reads “the first day” for Genesis 1:5, whereas the

⁴³ R. Bradshaw, chapter 6. In chapter 1, he supplies an example where a poor translation had a much greater and longer lasting impact. “Augustine of Hippo developed his doctrine of original sin from the Old Latin version of Romans 5:12. This mistranslated the Greek and implied that the sin of Adam was passed on to his descendants. In contrast to this view, the Greek Fathers, including John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Athanasius, Methodius and Gregory of Nyssa generally held that Adam passed on merely the consequences of his sin, i.e. death. Augustine's doctrine of original sin still remains central to the Roman Catholic doctrine of baptism.”

⁴⁴ New Advent, “Angels,” <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01476d.htm> (accessed June 17, 2010).

⁴⁵ The apocryphal *Book of Enoch* is the first to teach this view around the fourth/third century BC. In this account, angels known as the Watchers are sent to guide mankind but instead fell into lust, intermarried with women, and led humanity into sin. References to this account appear frequently in subsequent Jewish and Christian writings.

⁴⁶ R. Bradshaw, chapter 5.

⁴⁷ “The term ‘giant’ [in the King James Version] from the Hebrew *nephilim* (5303) is influenced by the Greek term *gigantes* in the Septuagint. Nephilim comes from the verb *naphal* (5307) meaning ‘to fall,’ in general, but is often associated with violence, hence often translated ‘overthrow, fall upon.’ In Num. 13:32, 33 it is also noted that they were ‘men of great stature.’ Emphasis should be placed upon the fact that they were men of violence who had no respect for other men.” S. Zodhiates, *Hebrew Greek Key Study Bible* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1988), 10.

Hebrew actually reads “one day” or “day one.” Third, the KJV adds the definite article “the” before “day” even though it is not present in the Hebrew. For example, Genesis 1:8 KJV says “the second day” when it should say “second day” or “a second day.” Adding “the” makes the reading easier in English, but it implies that it is talking about a specific period of time (i.e., a solar day) rather than representing time generically. Given the dominance of the KJV for the last several centuries, this mistranslation has played a major role in popularizing the calendar-day interpretation among English speakers.

- **Sirach 18.1—Poor translation.** The book of *Sirach* (also known as *Ecclesiasticus*) was highly esteemed in the early church and is included among the Apocrypha in Catholic Bibles. It was written in Hebrew but was mainly known through Greek and Latin translations. *Sirach* 18:1 in the NRSV reads, “He who lives forever created all things together.” The word “together” in the Greek is *koine*, which means that everything was created “in common.” The Latin version instead uses *simul* meaning “at the same time,” which fundamentally shifts the meaning of this verse to teaching that God created everything simultaneously or “at once.” The great church father Augustine, who knew only Latin, quoted this verse to support his view that the days of creation were instantaneous rather than solar days.⁴⁸
- **Firmament—Translational Inertia.** Translational inertia is when a new translation is unduly influenced by previous translations rather than following the original. When this occurs, problems in early translations may get propagated rather than being corrected. There are two notable cases to consider here. The first is when translators try to stay close to existing translations that people are comfortable with. When Jerome was commissioned to create a Latin version of the Bible, he was originally expected to translate the Old Testament from the Septuagint—not the Hebrew—and to stay close to the existing Latin translations.⁴⁹ (He did ultimately translate the Old Testament from Hebrew.) The second case is when the translators have difficulty understanding the original text; they may look to other translations to fill in the gaps. This was true in the case of the KJV because Hebrew had been a dead language in Europe during the Middle Ages, resulting in limited Hebrew scholarship. As a result, the KJV sometimes reflects the Septuagint and Vulgate texts. For example, the Hebrew word *raqia* (“sky”) in Genesis 1:6 is rendered as “firmament” in the KJV, which is a direct carryover from the Vulgate’s *firmamentum*.⁵⁰
- **Ages at Fatherhood—Changed Values.** The ages at fatherhood in the Genesis genealogies in the Septuagint differ noticeably from the values in our Hebrew manuscripts. It seems that the translators deliberately altered these values to make the gradual decrease in life spans smoother.⁵¹ (For reference, these values are tabulated in Table 7, Variation between Different Translations in the Age at Fatherhood below.) This simple change had a dramatic effect on attempts to date back to Adam (for those assuming no gaps in the genealogies). (See Table 8, Early Statements Concerning the

⁴⁸ It should be noted that Augustine had other biblical reasons for rejecting a calendar-day interpretation of Genesis 1. He believed that the first three creation “days” could not be ordinary days if the sun was not created until the fourth day (Genesis 1:14–19). He also realized that the seventh creation day (Genesis 2:1–3) was not closed out and so believed it to be eternal.

⁴⁹ Garry Wills, *Saint Augustine* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1999), 87.

⁵⁰ R. Whitefield, *Reading Genesis One* (San Jose, CA: Rodney Whitefield Publisher, 2003), 90–91.

⁵¹ William Henry Green, “Primeval Chronology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, April 1890, 285–303. A copy of this article may be found online at <http://www.reasons.org/resources/non-staff-papers/primeval-chronology> (accessed June 12, 2010).

Age of Humanity.) Those using the Hebrew values (e.g. the *Book of Jubilees*, *4 Esdras*, and the Jewish calendar) produced estimates ranging around 4000 BC for the creation of Adam. The early church fathers relied instead on the Septuagint and pre-Vulgate Latin translations based on it and so arrived at estimates in the range of 5600–5200 BC. This is a difference of more than 1,000 years that can be attributed solely to their use of the Septuagint. Jerome’s Vulgate restored the Hebrew values so later estimates based on it shifted back to around 4000 BC. This may seem unimportant but it had eschatological implications as we shall see in the next section.

- **Ussher–Lightfoot Chronology—Popular Commentary.** Many Bibles contain supplementary materials—such as footnotes, commentaries, and appendices—to help the reader better understand what they are reading. Such materials, however, may contain speculation or reflect the opinions of the commentators. Because this information is often placed alongside Scripture, readers may equate the supplementary materials as being authoritative. One notable example of this is the Ussher–Lightfoot chronology, which was included in footnotes or even headers of some KJV Bibles.⁵² This scheme gave dates for each major event in the Bible starting with the creation of the world in 4004 BC. The popularity of the KJV among Protestants effectively spread and canonized this estimate for the age of the earth throughout the English-speaking world. This in turn helped solidify their assumptions regarding Genesis 1–11. While these calculations do not represent errors in the text of the KJV itself, they do demonstrate how commentaries in popular translations can dramatically shape the age debate.

In these ways, our Bible translations have influenced our understanding of Genesis—usually without our realizing it. For there to be resolution in the modern debate, we need to go back and reexamine the Hebrew original.

Eschatology and Creation Week Pattern for Human History

Jewish apocalyptic ideas also played a decisive role in shaping early views on the Genesis genealogies and the age of the earth. But what do the end times have to do with the beginning? The creation week pattern for human history taught that God’s final judgment would occur exactly six thousand years after creation and the new creation would begin after the seven thousandth year had passed. So if one could date back to creation, you could then leap forward six thousand years to know exactly when God would bring about His ultimate judgment on the world. (This was popular among early Christians even though attempts to date the end times are strongly discouraged in Scripture.)⁵³ This apocalyptic speculation severely limited how people understood the Genesis genealogies because even very modest gaps in the genealogies would suggest an earth older than six thousand years.

No one knows for certain how or when the creation week pattern for human history first developed. The earliest hints appear in Jewish apocalyptic literature⁵⁴ around the second century BC. Whether attempts to date back to creation based on Genesis 5 and 11 led to the development of this six-thousand-year framework or the reverse cannot be definitely established. Most likely the two worked in concert, with the development of one reinforcing the development of the other. One thing is certain: this apocalyptic framework was intended to encourage the faithful by reminding them of God’s absolute sovereignty and His imminent judgment. This was important because the Jews were subject to foreign powers and surrounded by pagan cultures. It played an equally important role in the early church.

⁵² Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 21–23.

⁵³ Matthew 24:36–51; Luke 17:20–37; Acts 1:6–7; and 1 Thessalonians 5:1–4.

⁵⁴ Apocalyptic Literature, Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocalyptic_literature (accessed June 12, 2010).

This apocalyptic tradition put severe constraints on interpretations of the Genesis genealogies. First, it explicitly limited gaps in the genealogies because the estimated age for the earth had to be less than six thousand years. Second, it was important that God's intervention would seem imminent. The sooner the events would be expected to occur, the greater the sense of urgency and the stronger the call for faithfulness. To fulfill this purpose, the predicted time of God's intervention had to be short—less than about 300 years. (The model was flexible enough to allow some differences in chronological estimates as we shall see in the next paragraph.) Third, it was important to minimize any uncertainty in chronological computation so that there would be no uncertainty in God's sovereign plan. This ruled out the possibility of even small gaps because it would make God's plan seem ambiguous and uncertain. Together, these things effectively imposed the notion that the world was young (less than six thousand years old) and that the Genesis genealogies could be used to compute the time back to creation (i.e., there were no gaps).⁵⁵

As previously noted, early Jewish writers working from the Hebrew text gave estimates for creation around 4000 BC while Christians using the Septuagint suggested 5600–5200 BC. Interestingly, the creation week pattern for human history was used with both of these divergent estimates. The early Jews subdivided the six thousand years into three 2,000-year ages, with the Messiah coming after 4,000 years, thus placing the Messiah around the first century. For those authors, the event was predicted to occur in their immediate future. In contrast, Christians identified Jesus as the Messiah and were looking instead for his second coming to set up his Millennial Kingdom at the end of the six thousandth year. Estimates based on the Septuagint would have placed Christ's return only a few hundred years in their future. In fact, Bradshaw reports that the shift from creation estimates of 5500 BC to 5200 BC (which occurred around the fourth century) might have been a deliberate attempt to cool apocalyptic expectation by shifting estimates of Christ's return further into the future.⁵⁶

Jerome's Vulgate restored the ages of fatherhood in Genesis 5 and 11 to match those in the Hebrew. As a result, subsequent estimates for when creation was said to have occurred shifted forward to around 4000 BC and placed Christ's return in their far future (around AD 2000). Not surprisingly, the creation week pattern for human history received less attention during this period because it no longer suggested that Jesus' return was imminent. It did receive new emphasis in the seventeenth century as Christ's return was again expected to be only a few centuries away. One important example of this is the Ussher–Lightfoot chronology in 1650, which taught that God created everything in 4004 BC. This date was chosen so that Christ's birth in 4 BC would correspond to exactly four thousand years from creation. (This was to fit the Jewish tradition that had the Messianic age starting at this point.) What is notable here is that this value was made to fit this millennial framework rather than being strictly derived from biblical–historical calculations. (Lightfoot's original estimate made 8 years earlier came to 3928 BC,⁵⁷ which demonstrates how easily such chronological estimates could be flexed to fit a predetermined plan.) So the creation week pattern and its impact on how people understood the Genesis genealogies continued long after the early church period.

Given the immense popularity of the creation week pattern for human history, just what impact did it have? Of the 21 figures we examined, only six (*Book of Jubilees*, Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria, Julius Africanus, Eusebius, Jewish calendar) directly attempted to compute a time span based on the Genesis genealogies. Two more (Josephus and *4 Esdras*) specified a time span that is potentially compatible with those estimates without clearly

⁵⁵ This creation week pattern correspondingly affected the debate over the days of creation. It limited the days to being very brief—either simple solar days or instantaneous.

⁵⁶ R. Bradshaw, chapter 3.

⁵⁷ Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 21–23.

indicating where they derived their estimate. Ten (2 *Enoch*, *Epistle of Barnabas*, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Origen, Cyprian, Methodius, Lactantius, Victorinus, and Augustine) based their statement of age directly on the creation week eschatological framework rather than Genesis. Of the remaining three, *1 Enoch* and Justin Martyr are unclear and Philo rejected attempts to date the earth. Therefore, while 18 gave a definite age for the world, only six (but possibly as many as 8) actually argued directly from the Genesis genealogies. This is significant because it indicates that the majority held to the six-thousand-year framework based on human tradition—not Scripture. Sadly, many young-earth creationists ignore this key difference and include those who only held to the creation week pattern for human history as supporters of their view of Genesis, thus artificially inflating support for it.⁵⁸

Greek Cosmology

Given that these early writers did not work in a vacuum, it is also important to consider how the surrounding pagan milieu may have shaped early thinking about Genesis. After the destruction of the first Jewish temple, Israel was dominated by various foreign powers. The Babylonians came first, followed by the Persians, Greeks, and Romans. Each of these people groups introduced their own religious and cultural ideas. This posed a serious challenge to the Jews—particularly those living outside the confines of Israel—who wanted to remain faithful to God. This tense situation was exacerbated by Greek Hellenism, which sought to impress its religious and cultural ideas on other peoples. Much of the Jewish intertestamental literature was written to help strengthen and equip believers to resist these foreign ideas. The early church arose during the Roman Empire and was similarly challenged by religious pluralism and Greek philosophy.

Of importance here is that each of these surrounding cultures had their own cosmologies that were dramatically different from the biblical one. However, the most direct challenge to a Judeo-Christian belief in creation came from Greek philosophy, which held that matter was eternal and uncreated because the notion of a beginning point for everything seemed absurd. In this view, matter would have always existed in a chaotic and shapeless state until the gods formed it into the things we see today. (They often viewed matter as evil or contemptible, so the gods would not have created it and so this task was sometimes relegated to the Demiurge instead.) This view ran in direct opposition to the Judeo-Christian view that God alone is eternal and brought everything into existence. Moreover, if matter was truly eternal as the Greeks taught, then that would elevate matter to being a second god—a direct affront to monotheism. So, the origin of the universe was a decisive battleground between Greco-Roman polytheism and Judeo-Christian monotheism.

The primary response to the Greek eternal universe by Jews and Christians was to set forth the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* or “creation out of nothing.” This declaration that matter is not eternal but was created by God was elucidated clearly for the first time in *2 Maccabees* 7.28 (second century BC), one of the books of the Apocrypha. Subsequently, Jewish and Christian scholars were unified in teaching this view.⁵⁹ Even more important, creation *ex nihilo* was considered an issue of orthodoxy. Tertullian declared that it was part of the “rule of faith” (Latin *regula fidei*) and Origen included it among the “teaching of the Apostles.”⁶⁰ In both cases, creation *ex nihilo* was placed on the same level as Jesus’ virgin birth, incarnation, death, and

⁵⁸ Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury, eds., *Coming to Grips with Genesis* (Green Forest, AR: Masters Books, 2008), 23–81.

⁵⁹ R. Bradshaw, chapter 2. None of the figures included in my study taught eternal matter; but three (Philo, Justin Martyr, and Clement of Alexandria) were somewhat vague in their support of creation *ex nihilo*.

⁶⁰ Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins* 1, *Against Hermogenes* 33, and *The Prescription Against Heresies* 13. Origen, *First Principles* preface 4–8.

resurrection. The Apostles' Creed (second century) and the Nicene Creed (fourth century) taught that God was the Maker of heaven and earth. Two great Reformation creeds—the Heidelberg Confession (sixteenth century) and the Westminster Confession of Faith (seventeenth century)—went a step further by explicitly declaring the “out of nothing” nature of God’s creation. Neither the days of creation nor the age of the earth were ever included in the rule of faith, treated as essential doctrine, or taught in key creedal statements.

This is important as we consider early views about age of the earth. First, the surrounding religious systems had their own ideas on how old the earth was (Egyptians 8,000–9,000 years, Phoenicians 30,000 years, Chaldeans 470,000 years, and Greeks “thousands of ages.”)⁶¹ This pressed Jewish and Christian thinkers to develop their own age estimates in order to distinguish themselves from their pagan counterparts. Theophilus, Julius Africanus, and Lactantius are particularly clear in seeing their age estimate as a rebuke of these pagan ages. Second, it effectively forced a very young age for the world. The Greek notion of eternal matter naturally led to a conclusion that the earth was very ancient. Those rejecting this conclusion would therefore be motivated to distance themselves from it by making the earth as young as possible. Thus, a recent date for creation served as a convenient line of demarcation between Judeo-Christian and pagan cosmologies.⁶² The problem is that neither Scripture nor the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* require a young earth.

Conclusions

While it is true that a number of early Jewish and Christian writers held that the world was young, it is far from a powerful vindication of young-earth creationist claims for several reasons:

- Chronological computations were largely done for apologetic reasons. Demonstrating that Moses and the prophets wrote prior to the Greek writers was critical for establishing Christian claims over and against Greek ones.
- Virtually all of the early church fathers based their understanding of Genesis on Greek and Latin translations of the Bible rather than Hebrew. This forced a narrow interpretation of the text—effectively canonizing the view that the genealogies were complete.
- More than half of statements on the age of the earth discussed in this paper were expressions of the creation week pattern for human history, not views derived from the Genesis genealogies. Those who did use the genealogies would have been strongly motivated to take them at face value (no gaps) because of this apocalyptic tradition.
- The view that the earth was young was driven by a need to oppose the prevailing Greek and pagan cosmologies. The key biblical issue at the time was the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*—not the age of the earth. The idea that the earth was young served as a convenient, but not necessarily biblical, apologetic tool.

Taken together, these observations strongly undercut the case for using these early Jewish and Christian figures to support modern young-earth claims. Much of the impetus for the belief that the Genesis 5 and 11 genealogies provided a true chronology was apologetic, linguistic, cultural, and eschatological, rather than an accurate understanding of the text. So while these men can

⁶¹ These ages are collected from the writings of Theophilus, Julius Africanus, and Lactantius.

⁶² Falsely equating a recent creation (or a young earth) with creation and Scripture and an old earth with atheistic materialism is still prevalent today. This was and still is an artificial paradigm and should be avoided.

provide fresh insights into Genesis because they are free from our modern assumptions and concerns, we should not use them as our model for understanding the Genesis genealogies.

The most important lesson we can learn from studying these early Jewish and Christian writers is that none of them considered the Genesis genealogies or the age of the earth to be matters of orthodoxy. Only the issue of creation *ex nihilo* rose to that level. Most of these early figures were entirely silent or said very little on this subject. Even those few (6 or possibly 8) who did specifically gave chronological estimates showed no indication of the kind of dogmatism on this issue that we see today. Even at the peak of the Protestant Reformation, where these subjects received a lot of attention, the age of the earth was never treated as an essential issue. Rather, it was treated as a secondary issue with room for disagreement. It is my expressed hope that all sides of the debate will take that to heart, reexamine Scripture and openly dialog with one another.

Table 1

Matthew's Genealogy (Matthew 1:3–17)¹

Abraham to David (14 names)		
Abraham	Hezron	Boaz
Isaac	Ram	Obed
Jacob	Amminadab	Jesse
Judah	Nahshon	David
Perez	Salmon	
 David to the Exile (14 names)		
Solomon	Jehoram ²	Manasseh
Rehoboam	Uzziah	Amon
Abijah	Jotham	Josiah
Asa	Ahaz	Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) ³
Jehoshaphat	Hezekiah	
 Exile to Jesus Christ (14 names)		
Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) ⁴	Azor	Matthan
Shealtiel ⁵	Zadok	Jacob
Zerubbabel	Akim	Joseph
Abiud	Eliud	Jesus Christ
Eliakim	Eleazar	

¹ The genealogies of Jesus presented by Matthew and Luke differ considerably in the names between David and Joseph. Some skeptics have suggested that one or both of the genealogies must therefore be in error. This discrepancy is resolved by noting that Matthew's genealogy is that of Joseph (Jesus' father) and Luke's genealogy is that of Mary (Jesus' mother, husband of Joseph). A more detailed analysis of this issue can be found in Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 385–386.

² After Jehoram comes Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah (2 Chronicles 21:4–26:27).

³ After Josiah comes Jehoiakim (2 Chronicles 36:1–9).

⁴ Jeconiah is counted in both sections to get the desired arrangement.

⁵ Shealtiel was the uncle and adoptive father of Zerubbabel. Pedaiah was Zerubbabel's actual father (1 Chronicles 3:17–19).

Table 2

Luke's Genealogy (Luke 3:23–38)¹

From Adam to Abraham (21 names)		
God	Enoch	Shelah
Adam	Methuselah	Eber
Seth	Lamech	Peleg
Enosh	Noah	Reu
Kenan	Shem	Serug
Mahalalel	Arphaxad	Nahor
Jared	Cainan ²	Terah
 Abraham to David (14 names)		
Abraham	Hezron	Boaz
Isaac	Ram ³	Obed
Jacob	Amminadab	Jesse
Judah	Nahshon	David
Perez	Salmon	
 David to the Exile (21 names)		
Nathan	Judah	Er
Mattatha	Simeon	Elmadam
Menna	Levi	Cosam
Melea	Matthat	Addi
Eliakim	Jorim	Melki
Jonam	Eliezer	Neri
Joseph	Joshua	Shealtiel ⁴
 Exile to Jesus Christ (21 names)		
Zerubbabel	Maath	Jannai
Rhesa	Naggai	Melki
Joanan	Esli	Levi
Joda	Nahum	Matthat
Josech	Amos	Eli (Heli)
Semein	Mattathias	Joseph
Mattathias	Joseph	Jesus Christ

¹ The genealogies of Jesus presented by Matthew and Luke differ considerably in the names between David and Joseph. Some skeptics have suggested that one or both of the genealogies must therefore be in error. This discrepancy is resolved by noting that Matthew's genealogy is that of Joseph (Jesus' father) and Luke's genealogy is that of Mary (Jesus' mother, husband of Joseph). A more detailed analysis of this issue can be found in Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 385–86.

² Name not found in Genesis 10:24, 11:12, and 1 Chronicles 1:24. (See Cainan—An Extra Name in Genesis 11?)

³ Some manuscripts have Admin and Arni in place of Ram.

⁴ Shealtiel was the uncle and adoptive father of Zerubbabel. Pedaiah was Zerubbabel's actual father (1 Chronicles 3:17–19).

Table 3

The Genealogies of Moses and Joshua

Moses, Aaron, and Miriam all play critical roles in the Exodus, and their genealogy appears four times in the Bible (Exodus 6:16–20; Numbers 26:57–59; 1 Chronicles 6:1–3; 23:6, 12–13). Joshua, son of Nun, was also a part of the Exodus and has his own genealogy (Numbers 13:8, 16; 1 Chronicles 7:20–27). Both sets of genealogies span the same 430-year period (Exodus 12:40–41; Acts 7:6) from the sojourn to Egypt till the Exodus from Egypt, yet one lists four generations and the other has twelve.

Moses' Genealogies

Levi¹
Kohath¹
Amram (and Jochebed²)

Moses, Aaron, and Miriam

Joshua's Genealogy

Joseph¹
Ephraim¹
Beriah
Rephah
Resheph
Telah
Tahan
Ladan
Ammihud
Elishama
Nun
Joshua (Hoshea)

Table 4

Priestly Lineage

1 Chronicles 6:3–15 and Ezra 7:1–5

The genealogy in 1 Chronicles 6:3–15 lists twenty-two names extending from Aaron to Seraiah. Ezra's genealogy (Ezra 7:1–5) overlaps the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 6 but only includes sixteen names. The italicized names are the six names found in 1 Chronicles 6 but absent in Ezra.

Aaron	<i>Amariah</i>	Ahitub
Eleazar	<i>Ahitub</i>	Zadok
Phinehas	<i>Zadok</i>	Shallum
Abishua	<i>Ahimaaz</i>	Hilkiah
Bukki	<i>Azariah</i>	Azariah
Uzzi	<i>Johanan</i>	Seraiah ³
Zerahiah	<i>Azariah</i> ⁴	
Meraioth	<i>Amariah</i>	

¹ Levi and his son Kohath were alive at the time of the sojourn to Egypt (Genesis 46:5–27; Exodus 1:1–4) as were Joseph and his son Ephraim (Genesis 41:52; 46:27).

² Amram's wife, Jochebed, was the daughter of Levi (Numbers 26:59) and Amram's father's sister (Exodus 6:20). This makes Jochebed the sister of Kohath, and hence she was also alive at the time of the sojourn to Egypt.

³ Seraiah is followed by Jehozadak, who was taken into captivity in the time of the exile to Babylon (1 Chronicles 6:15).

⁴ Azariah was priest in the time of Solomon's temple (1 Chronicles 6:10).

Table 5

Head Temple Musicians

1 Chronicles 6:33–47

This passage contains three genealogies, one for each head temple musician according to the Levitical division that they belonged to. All three men (Heman of the Kohathites, Asaph of the Gershonites, and Ethan of the Merarites) were contemporary with one another and served in the time of King David (1 Chronicles 6:31). All of the genealogies start with Levi in the time of the patriarchs and conclude in the time of King David and so span the same approximately 900-year period. It is important to note that very different numbers of generations are shown for the exact same time span, which strongly suggests that at least two of the genealogies were telescoped.

1 Chronicles 6:33–38 (21 names total)¹	1 Chronicles 6:39–43 (15 names total)¹	1 Chronicles 6:44–47 (14 names total)¹
Levi	Levi	Levi
Kohath	Gershon	Merari
Izhar	Jahath	Mushi
Ebiasaph	Shimei	Mahli
Assir	Zimnah	Shamer (Shemer)
Tahath	Ethan	Bani
Zephaniah	Adaiah	Amzi
Azariah	Zerah	Hilkiah
Joel	Ethi	Amaziah
Elkanah	Malchiah	Hashabiah
Amasai	Baaseiah	Malluch
Mahath	Michael	Abdi
Elkanah	Shimea	Kishi
Zuph	Berachiah	
Toah		
Eliel		
Jeroham		
Elkanah		
Samuel (Shemuel)		
Joel		
Heman	Asaph	Ethan

¹ The locations of gaps in the genealogies are unknown and are for the purpose of illustration only. All three genealogies span the same time range and Heman, Asaph, and Ethan were contemporaries, so gaps are shown to balance the different number of generations.

Table 6 Genesis Genealogies

Genealogy from Adam to Noah (Genesis 5)

Name	Age at Fatherhood ²	Age at Death	Ussher's Chronology ¹	
			Year of Birth	Year of Death
Adam	130	930	1	930
Seth	105	912	130	1,042
Enosh	90	905	235	1,140
Kenan	70	910	325	1,235
Mahalalel	65	895	395	1,290
Jared	162	962	460	1,422
Enoch	65	365 ³	622	987
Methuselah	187	969	687	1,656
Lamech	182	777	874	1,651
Noah	500	950 ⁴	1,056	2,006

Genealogy from Noah to Abraham (Genesis 11:10–32)

Name	Age at Fatherhood ²	Age at Death	Ussher's Chronology ¹	
			Year of Birth	Year of Death
Shem	100	500	1,556	2,036
Arphaxad ⁵	35	403	1,656	2,059
Shelah	30	403	1,691	2,094
Eber	34	430	1,721	2,151
Peleg	30	209	1,755	1,964
Reu	32	207	1,785	1,992
Serug	30	200	1,817	2,017
Nahor	29	119	1,847	1,966
Terah	70	205	1,876	2,081
Abram (Abraham)	100 ⁶	175 ⁷	1,946	2,121

¹ These dates are based on the assumption that Genesis 5 and 11 represent a complete genealogy, that the ages at fatherhood can simply be summed, and that the creation of Adam represents year 1. These are assumptions that were used by James Ussher and later by John Lightfoot in assigning a date for the creation of the world at 4004 BC.

² Values for the age at fatherhood are taken from the accepted Hebrew manuscripts. The Greek Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch translations give different values for these ages. (See Variation between Different Translations in the Age at Fatherhood.)

³ Enoch was translated into heaven instead of dying (Genesis 5:24).

⁴ Genesis 9:29.

⁵ According to Luke 3:36 and some copies of the Septuagint, Cainan appears between Arphaxad and Shelah. (See Cainan—An Extra Name in Genesis 11?).

⁶ Genesis 17:17.

⁷ Genesis 25:7.

Table 7

Variation between Different Translations in the Age at Fatherhood¹

Genealogy from Adam to Noah (Genesis 5)

	Hebrew	Greek Septuagint	Samaritan Pentateuch ²
Adam	130	230	130
Seth	105	205	105
Enosh	90	190	90
Kenan	70	170	70
Mahalalel	65	165	65
Jared	162	162	62
Enoch	65	165	65
Methuselah	187	167 or 187 ³	67
Lamech	182	188	53
Noah	600	600	600

Genealogy from Noah to Abraham (Genesis 11)

	Hebrew	Greek Septuagint
Shem	100	100
Arphaxad	35	135
Shelah	30	130
Eber	34	134
Peleg	30	130
Reu	32	132
Serug	30	130
Nahor	29	179
Terah	70	70
Abraham	100	100

¹ Information taken from William Henry Green, "Primeval Chronology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April 1890), 285–303. Internet version: <http://www.reasons.org/resources/non-staff-papers/primeval-chronology> (accessed June 12, 2010). Green speculates that the ages given in the Greek Septuagint and Samaritan Pentateuch were an attempt by translators to make the progression of ages at fatherhood more smooth and regular. The values for Genesis 11 are taken from the NIV and an online version of the Septuagint.

² The values in the Samaritan Pentateuch differ from both the Hebrew and the Septuagint. (The Samaritan Pentateuch was not used by any of the figures in this study and is included for comparison only.)

³ The number varies in different manuscripts.

Table 8 Early Statements Concerning the Age of the Humanity

Early Jewish Writers

Writer	Date	Date of Creation of Adam (BC)
<i>1 Enoch</i>	c. 170–100 BC ¹	Unclear
<i>Book of Jubilees</i>	c. 140–100 BC	~3900
<i>2 Enoch</i>	0–AD 100	< 7000
Philo	c. 20 BC–c. AD 50	Silent
Josephus	37/38–c. AD 100	5717 or ~4600
<i>4 Esdras</i>	c. AD 100	~4000
Jewish Calendar	AD 359	3761

Early Christian Writers

Writer	Date	Date of Creation of Adam (BC)
Justin Martyr	AD 100–160	~5000 (unclear)
<i>Epistle of Barnabus</i>	c. AD 70–135	< 5800
Theophilus of Antioch	c. AD 115–181	~5510
Clement of Alexandria	c. AD 150– c. 215	5592
Hippolytus of Rome	AD 170–236	5500
Julius Africanus	c. AD 160–240	5500
Origen	AD 185–253	< 10,000
Cyprian	c. AD 200–258	< 5700
Lactantius	c. AD 250–325	< 5700
Eusebius of Caesarea ²	AD 263–339	5228
Augustine of Hippo	AD 354–430	< 5600

Irenaeus (c. AD 130–202), Methodius (c. 260–312), and Victorinus (d. AD 304) did not give a specific date for creation but clearly taught the creation week pattern for human history.

¹ The *Book of Enoch* was composed by multiple authors at different times between about 300 BC and 1 BC. The Apocalypse of Weeks section was likely written between 170–100 BC.

² The information for Eusebius is taken from Robert I. Bradshaw, “Creationism and the Early Church,” updated January 25, 1999, <http://www.robibradshaw.com/contents.htm>, Table 3.4 (accessed January 9, 2012).