

## Are There Gaps in the Genesis Genealogies?

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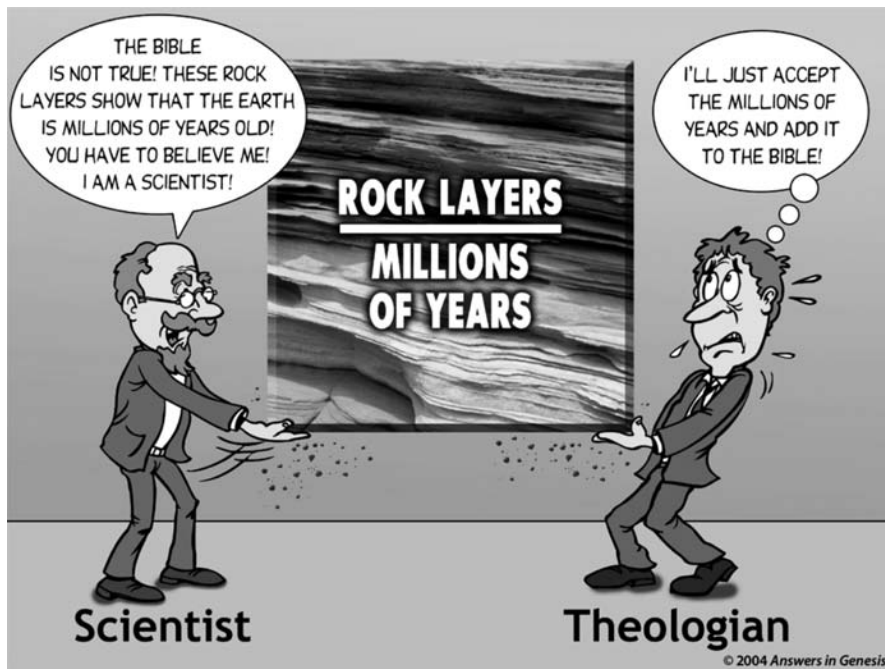
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Most of us love to read portions of Scripture that give accounts of victories, miracles, and drama. We enjoy far less the Scriptures that outline a certain person begat a son or daughter, who in turn begat a son, thus beginning a long list of begets. Most people believe the genealogies contain only dull details, but those of us who keep in mind that “every word is given by inspiration of God” see that even these so-called dull passages contain vital truth that can be trusted.

Genesis 5 and 11 contain two such genealogies. It may be hard to believe, but Genesis 5 and 11 are actually two of the more controversial chapters in the Bible, even in Christian circles.

Because so many Christians and Christian leaders have accepted the secular dates for the origin of man and the universe, they must work out ways that such dates can somehow be incorporated into the Bible’s historical account. In other words, they must convince people that the Bible’s genealogical records do not present an unbroken line of chronology. If such an unbroken line exists, then we should be able to calculate dates concerning the creation of man and the universe.

To fit the idea of billions of years into Scripture, many Christian leaders, since the early 19th century, have reinterpreted the days of creation to mean long ages. Biblical creationist literature has meticulously addressed this topic



many times, showing clearly that the word *day*, as used in Genesis 1 for each of the six days of creation, means an ordinary, approximately 24-hour day.<sup>1</sup>

A straightforward addition of the chronogenealogies yields a date for the beginning near 4000 B.C. Chronologists working from the Bible consistently get 2,000 years between Adam and Abraham. Few would dispute that Abraham lived around 2000 B.C. Many Christian leaders, though, claim there are gaps in the Genesis genealogies. One of their arguments is that the word *begat*, as used in the time-line from the first man Adam to Abraham in Genesis 5 and 11, can skip generations. If this argument were true, the date for creation using the biblical time-line of history cannot be worked out.

In a recent debate,<sup>2</sup> a well-known progressive creationist<sup>3</sup> stated that he believed a person could date Adam back 100,000 years from the present. Since most modern scholars place the date of Abraham around 2000 B.C. (Ussher's date for Abraham's birth is 1996 B.C.), the remaining 96,000 years must fit into the Genesis 5 and 11 genealogies, between Adam and Abraham.

1. See, for example, [www.answersingenesis.org/go/days-of-creation](http://www.answersingenesis.org/go/days-of-creation).
2. Ken Ham, Jason Lisle, Hugh Ross, Walt Kaiser, *The Great Debate: Young Earth vs. Old Earth*, DVD (Kentucky: Answers in Genesis, 2006), program 10, bonus 2.
3. Most progressive creationists believe that the six days of creation were actually long periods of time, not 24-hour days.

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4004 BC	2348 BC	2242 BC	1996-1821 BC
Creation	Flood	Tower of Babel	Abraham
By accepting these three points (right), we can determine the dates for key events (above) going back to the beginning of time:*			
*All are based on the Masoretic text.			
			1. The word for <i>day</i> (Hebrew: <i>yom</i> ) in Genesis 1 for the days of creation are ordinary days (of approximately 24 hours).
			2. The word for <i>begat</i> ( <i>yalad</i> ) in the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 does not skip any generations.
			3. The date of Abraham was 1996 BC.

Now, if we estimate that 40 years equals one generation, which is fairly generous,<sup>4</sup> this means that 2,500 generations are missing from these genealogies. But this makes the genealogies ridiculously meaningless.

### Two Keys to Consider

Those who claim that there are gaps in these genealogies need to demonstrate this from the biblical text and not simply say that gaps exist. However, consider the following:

1. Although in the Hebrew way of thinking, the construction “X is the son of Y” does not always mean a literal father/son relationship,<sup>5</sup> additional biographical information in Genesis 5 and 11 strongly supports the view that there are no gaps in these chapters. So we know for certain that the following are literal father/son relationships: Adam/Seth, Seth/Enosh, Lamech/Noah, Noah/Shem, Eber/Peleg, and Terah/Abram. Nothing in these chapters indicates that the “X *begat* Y” means something other than a literal father/son relationship.
2. Nowhere in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word for *begat* (*yalad*) used in any other way than to mean a single-generation (e.g., father/son or mother/daughter) relationship. The Hebrew word *ben* can mean *son* or *grandson*, but the word *yalad* never skips generations.

### Six Arguments Refuted

In the recent debate (mentioned previously), various biblical references were given as proofs that the Hebrew word *yalad* does not always point to the

4. Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004), p. 295.

5. Compare 1 Chronicles 6:47 and Ezra 8:18.

## The New Answers Book 2

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very next generation. However, when analyzed carefully, these arguments actually confirm what we are asserting concerning the word *begat*.

### Argument 1

Genesis 46:15 says, “These be the sons of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob in Padanaram, with his daughter Dinah: all the souls of his sons and his daughters were thirty and three” (KJV). The word *bare* here is the Hebrew word *yalad*, which is also translated *begat*. It is claimed by some that because there are sons of various wives, grandsons, daughters, etc., in this list of “thirty and three,” the word *begat* is referring to all these and can’t be interpreted as we assert.

### Is Argument 1 Relevant?

A person needs to read the quoted verse carefully to correctly understand its meaning. The *begat* (*bare*) refers to the sons born in Padanaram. Genesis 35:23 lists the six sons born in Padanaram (those whom Leah begat), who are listed as part of the total group of 33 children in Genesis 46:15. Thus, this passage confirms that *begat* points to the generation immediately following — a literal parent/child relationship.

### Argument 2

Matthew 1:8 omits Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah, going directly from Joram to Uzziah. Matthew 1:11 skips Jehoiakim between Josiah and Jeconiah. These passages prove that the word *begat* skips generations.

### Is Argument 2 Relevant?

Here, the Greek word for *begat* is *gennao*, which shows flexibility not found in the Hebrew word and does allow for the possibility that a generation or more may be skipped. The only way we would know that a generation has been skipped is by checking the Hebrew passages. However, it is linguistically deceptive to use the Greek word for *begat* to define the Hebrew word for *begat*. Also, Matthew 1 is intentionally incomplete when reading Matthew 1:1 and Matthew 1:17, merely giving 14 generations between key figures of Abraham, David, and Jesus.

### Argument 3

Genesis 46:18, 22, and 25 says, “These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter, and these she bare unto Jacob, even sixteen souls. . . . These are the sons of Rachel, which were born to Jacob: all the souls were fourteen. . . . These are the sons of Bilhah, which Laban gave to Rachel his daughter, and she bare these unto Jacob: all the souls were seven” (KJV). In verse 18, the Hebrew word *yalad* (*begat* or *bore*) implies a grandson, as well as a son; so the word *begat* cannot be used to show a direct relationship.

## Are There Gaps in the Genesis Genealogies?

### Is Argument 3 Relevant?

The word *bare* in verse 18 refers to Zilpah's actual sons, referenced in verses 16 (Gad) and 17 (Asher). Note the pattern in this chapter. In verse 15 we are given the total number of Leah's offspring (33), in verse 18 the total of Zilpah's offspring (16), in verse 22 the total of Rachel's offspring (14), and in verse 25 the total of Bilhah's offspring (7). This makes a total of 70. But nowhere is it stated that these four wives physically bore the total number of sons listed for each.

What this passage shows, as stated earlier, is that the Hebrew word for *son* (*ben*) may include grandsons. In the case of Zilpah, her two sons are clearly listed, as well as the children of Gad and Asher. To insist that in this case only (and not the cases of Leah, Rachel, and Bilhah) the summary total given at the end of verse 18 implies that all these were begotten of Zilpah is not justified by the context, and therefore, is not sound hermeneutics. The context makes it very clear that Zilpah had only two sons, and this passage does not show that the Hebrew word *yalad* (*begat* or *bore*) implies a grandson, as well as a son.

### Argument 4

An example of where the word *begat* omits generations is 1 Chronicles 7:23–27. It is clear from this passage that there are ten generations from Ephraim to Joshua, whereas Genesis 15:16 says there were only four generations from the time the children of Israel entered Egypt to the time they left. Therefore, the Hebrew word for *begat* does not always mean the next generation.

### Is Argument 4 Relevant?

This argument seems logically airtight except for two minor points. The Hebrew word *yalad* for *begat* is not used in the 1 Chronicles passage, and Genesis 15:16 is misquoted. Genesis states that “in the fourth generation” the children of Israel would leave Egypt — not that there would be a maximum of four generations. For this prophecy in Genesis to be fulfilled, some of the fourth generation would be in the exodus from Egypt — and they were. Exodus 6 lists the generations from Levi to Moses, showing that Moses and Aaron were in the fourth generation. Therefore the passage in 1 Chronicles cannot be used to prove that the Hebrew word for *begat* can skip a generation.

It is quite helpful, however, to explain how the Israelites became so numerous during their stay in Egypt. The descendants of Joshua appear to have had a new generation about every 20 years, whereas the descendants of Moses and Aaron had a new generation about every 50 years.

## Argument 5

In Luke 3:36, the name Cainan is listed, which is not listed in the Old Testament chronologies. The present copies of the Septuagint (ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) incorrectly have the name Cainan inserted in the Old Testament genealogies. The great Baptist Hebrew scholar John Gill (c. A.D. 1760), in his exposition on this verse, wrote:

This Cainan is not mentioned by Moses in Genesis 11:12 nor has he ever appeared in any Hebrew copy of the Old Testament, nor in the Samaritan version, nor in the Targum; nor is he mentioned by Josephus, nor in 1 Chronicles 1:24 where the genealogy is repeated; nor is it in Beza's most ancient Greek copy of Luke: it indeed stands in the present copies of the Septuagint, but was not originally there; and therefore could not be taken by Luke from there, but seems to be owing to some early negligent transcriber of Luke's Gospel, and since put into the Septuagint to give it authority: I say early, because it is in many Greek copies, and in the Vulgate Latin, and all the Oriental versions, even in the Syriac, the oldest of them; but ought not to stand neither in the text, nor in any version: for certain it is, there never was such a Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, for Salah was his son; and with him the next words should be connected.<sup>6</sup>

### Is Argument 5 Relevant?

Since Gill's commentary was written, the oldest manuscript we have of Luke, the *P75*, was found. It dates to the late second century A.D. and does not include Cainan in the genealogy. This verse in Luke should not be used to prove that the genealogies in Genesis have gaps, because it has poor textual authority.

## Argument 6

Author and radio host Harold Camping argues for a unique interpretation of the chronologies in Genesis 5 and 11. According to his interpretation, Adam was created in 11,013 B.C. The chronological statements in these two chapters are of the following form.

When X was A years old he begat Y. He lived B years after he begat Y and died at the age of C years. So  $A + B = C$ .

6. Note on Luke 3:36 in: John Gill, D.D., *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament; The Whole Illustrated with Notes, Taken from the Most Ancient Jewish Writings* (London: printed for Mathews and Leigh, 18 Strand, by W. Clowes, Northumberland-Court, 1809). Edited, revised, and updated by Larry Pierce, 1994–1995 for The Word CD-ROM. See also chapter 27, "Isn't the Bible Full of Contradictions?"

## Are There Gaps in the Genesis Genealogies?

Camping interprets this statement as follows:

When X was A years old he begat a progenitor of Y. He lived B years after he begat a progenitor of B and died at age C, which was the same year that B was born.

### Is Argument 6 Relevant?

We must give Mr. Camping credit for originality and ingenuity, for we are not aware of anyone who interpreted these verses as such before him. As proof for this interpretation, Mr. Camping cites Matthew 1:8 that the word *begat* does not mean a father/son relationship. We have already discussed this line of reasoning in argument 2 and refuted it, thus exploding Mr. Camping's argument.

While claiming to honor the text of the Bible, Mr. Camping demonstrates a profound misunderstanding of the Hebrew verb forms for *begat* found in chapter 5 and 11 of Genesis. These verbs use the *hiphil* form of the verb. Most Hebrew verbs use the *qal* form, which corresponds to the active indicative tense in English. *Hiphil* usually expresses the causative action of *qal*.

he eats	he causes to eat
he comes	he causes to come, he brings
he reigned	he made king, he crowned

The *hiphil* has no exact English equivalent and is difficult to capture the meaning in English. Some modern English translations use the word *fathered* instead of the word *begat*, thus removing the ambiguity. To make it absolutely clear, the verb could be translated *X himself fathered Y*, but that is awkward English. It is difficult to father a remote descendant without committing incest! When the Hebrew verb form is honored in English, it precludes the interpretation Mr. Camping places on it. God chose this form to make it absolutely clear that we understand that there are no missing generations in chapters 5 and 11 of Genesis. Any other Hebrew verb form would not have been nearly as emphatic as the *hiphil* form.

In his latest book *Time Has an End*, Mr. Camping sets out a complete chronology for the Bible using his defective understanding of the chronologies in Genesis 5 and 11, which includes the following mistakes.

- Israel's time in Egypt was 430 years.
- The date for the Exodus is wrong.
- The chronology for the time of the judges is confused.

## The New Answers Book 2

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- The chronology of the divided kingdom is partially based on Dr. Edwin Thiele's work *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, which contradicts the Bible in many places.
- The end of the world in 2011. (His earlier prediction of 1994 had to be reinterpreted.)

Rather than refute these incorrect ideas, we recommend the *Chronology of the Old Testament* (Master Books, 2005) by Dr. Floyd Jones for a more accurate, biblically based chronology that is devoid of the speculations of Mr. Camping and refutes most of Camping's chronology.

### Missing Generations?

Many creationists believe the earth is about 10,000 years old in an attempt to make the biblical record conform to modern archaeological ideas. According to these ideas, Egypt began around 3500 B.C. and Babylon in 4000 B.C. Since these nations speak different languages, their founding must have been after the Tower of Babel, which occurred after the Flood. So some creationists place the Flood around 5000 B.C. and the creation around 10,000 B.C. It is curious that, having rejected the evidence for long ages, these creationists are inadvertently and blindly trusting man's fallible dating methods for archaeological data, which rests on just as flimsy a foundation as does the evidence for long ages.<sup>7</sup>

Assuming these creationists are correct, how many generations are missing from Genesis 5 and 11? We will use the Hebrew text for these calculations; using other versions such as the Septuagint (LXX) makes the matter even more improbable.

According to the Hebrew text, there were 1,656 years between creation and the Flood and 1,556 years between creation and Noah's first son, or 10 generations. Assuming the average generation (from father to son) was 156 years (divide 1,556 by 10), how many extra generations are needed to get 5,000 years from the creation to Noah's first son? Divide 5,000 by 156 and you get about 32 generations. On the average, then, for every generation listed in Genesis 5, two are missing! However, let's examine Genesis 5 more closely:

1. There are no missing generations between Adam and Seth, since Seth is a direct replacement for Abel, whom Cain murdered (Genesis 4:25).

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7. See Larry Vardiman, Andrew Snelling, and Eguene Chaffin, eds., *Radioisotopes and the Age of the Earth*, vol. 2 (El Cajon, CA: Institute for Creation Research; Chino Valley, AZ: Creation Research Society, 2005).



## Are There Gaps in the Genesis Genealogies?

2. There are no missing generations between Seth and Enosh, since Seth named him (Genesis 4:25).
3. Jude says Enoch was the seventh from Adam (Jude 14), so there are no missing generations between Adam and Enoch.
4. Lamech named Noah, so there are no missing generations there (Genesis 5:29).
5. Some Hebrew scholars believe that the name *Methuselah* means “when he dies it is sent,” referring to the Flood. Assuming no gaps in the chronology, Methuselah died the same year the Flood began. Some Jews believed that God gave Noah time to mourn the death of Methuselah, whom they believe died a week before the Flood began (Genesis 7:4). If this is so, then no missing generations can be inserted here. If this were not the case, then this is the only place in Genesis 5 one might attempt to shoehorn the missing 22 generations! Would you trust a chronologist who was so careful to record names and ages yet omit 22 generations in his tabulation in one place? It simply doesn't follow.

As we have seen, careful exegesis of the Bible simply does not allow for an extra 22 generations.

A similar analysis can be done for Genesis 11, which features 10 generations over 355 years, therefore averaging 36 years per generation. Those who hold to a creation occurring in 10,000 B.C. and the Flood happening in 5,000 B.C. have expanded this time period from 355 years to over 2,600 years. Assuming each generation lasts 36 years, then there would be 72 generations, such that for every generation listed, six are missing. If the writer of Genesis was so careless as to omit over 85 percent of the generations in Genesis 11, why did he waste time giving us the information in the first place? What purpose would it serve, since it would be so inaccurate?

These examples show the folly of accepting a creation event as distant as 10,000 B.C. Those who accept even longer ages have a worse problem; they must insert 10 to 100 times as many “missing generations” in Genesis 5 and 11 as those who hold to a creation of about 10,000 B.C. Interestingly, both camps loathe explaining where these missing generations are to be inserted. All they know for sure is that they are missing! Those who hold to the inerrancy of the Scriptures should reject all attempts to make the earth older than the Hebrew text warrants, which is about 4000 B.C.

### Conclusion

The Scriptures themselves attest to the fact that the secular dates given for the age of the universe, man's existence on the earth, and so on, are not correct, because they are based on the fallible assumptions of fallible humans. Nothing in observational science contradicts the time-line of history as recorded in the Bible.

But there are two more reasons that these genealogies are vital. First, they are given in Scripture to show clearly that the Bible is real history and that we are all descendants of a real man, Adam; thus all human beings are related.

Second, the Son of God stepped into this history to fulfill the promise of Genesis 3:15, the promise of a Savior. This Savior died and rose again to provide a free gift of salvation to the descendants of Adam — all of whom are sinners and are separated from their Creator.

Without the genealogies, how can it be proven that Jesus is the One who would fulfill this promise? Indeed, perhaps the primary purpose of the genealogies is to show that Jesus fulfilled the promise of God the Father.

We can trust these genealogies because they are a part of the infallible, inerrant Word of God.