

## THE BIBLE AND THE AGE OF THE EARTH

Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

**I have heard it said that biblical genealogies are so filled with gaps that they are “useless” in matters of chronology. Is this true, or do the genealogies provide accurate chronological information as well? Can these genealogies be trusted in matters of chronology?**

Through the years, religionists who have become enamored with (and who have ardently defended) pseudoscientific attempts to date the Earth in evolutionary terms of billions of years, have stated that the biblical genealogies must not be used for chronological purposes because they allegedly contain “huge gaps” that render them ineffective for that purpose. In so commenting, most writers reference the classic work of William H. Green (1890) in this area. The work of Green on Old Testament genealogies usually is highly acclaimed, and accepted uncritically, by those who wish to place “gaps” (of whatever size) in the biblical genealogies. The argument usually goes something like this (to quote one writer): “Unfortunately for those who wish to attach a precise date on some historical events by using genealogies, their attempts are thwarted.” Thus, we are asked to believe that the genealogies are relatively useless in matters of chronology.

However, these same writers usually evince a complete omission of more recent work in this area—work which has shown that much of what Green had to say is at best incomplete, and at worst, irrelevant. When one discusses the genealogies, he does his audience (or reader) a disservice if he omits a discussion of Luke’s genealogy. Some are quick to talk about Genesis 5 and 11, but rarely do you see a discussion of Luke’s material (often it is conspicuously missing from any such discussions on genealogical materials). One performs a further disservice if he does not point out two very important points that come to bear on this whole discussion. First, to use the words of Arthur C. Custance:

We are told again and again that some of these genealogies contain gaps: but what is never pointed out by those who lay the emphasis on these gaps, is that they only know of the existence of these gaps because the Bible elsewhere fills them in. How otherwise could one know of them? But if they are filled in, they are not gaps at all! Thus, in the final analysis the argument is completely without foundation (1967, p 3).

If anyone should want to find “gaps” in the genealogies, it would certainly be a man like Custance, who spent his life desperately searching for ways to allow the Bible to contain an “old Earth” scenario. Yet even he admitted that the argument that the genealogies contain sizable gaps is ill-founded.

Second, and this point cannot be overemphasized, **even if there were gaps in the genealogies, there would not necessarily be gaps in the chronologies therein recorded. The question of chronology is not the same as that of genealogy!** This is a major point overlooked by those who accuse the genealogies of being “useless” in matters of chronology. The “more recent work” alluded to above, which sheds additional light on the accuracy of the genealogies, co-

mes from James B. Jordan’s timely articles (1979, 1980). Jordan has done an extensive review of the work of Green, and has shown Green’s arguments to be untrustworthy in several important respects. To quote Jordan:

Gaps in genealogies, however, do not prove gaps in chronologies. The known gaps all occur in non-chronological genealogies. Moreover, even if there were gaps in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11, this would not affect the chronological information therein recorded, for even if Enosh were the great-grandson of Seth, it would still be the case that Seth was 105 years old when Enosh was born, according to a simple reading of the text. Thus, genealogy and chronology are distinct problems with distinct characteristics. They ought not to be confused (p. 12).

Much recent material **has** confused these two issues. For example, one writer stated: “Obviously, abridgment of the genealogies has taken place and these genealogies cannot be chronologies,” when exactly the opposite is true, as Jordan’s work accurately documents. Matthew, for example, was at liberty to arrange his genealogy of Christ in three groups of 14 (making some “omissions”) because his genealogy was derived from complete lists found in the Old Testament. In the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11, remember also that the inclusion of the father’s age at the time of his son’s birth is wholly without meaning unless chronology is intended! Else why would the Holy Spirit provide such “irrelevant” information?

There can be little doubt that some have painted a distorted picture for audiences and readers when suggesting to them that substantial “gaps” occur in the biblical genealogies. Such distortion occurs, for example, when it is suggested that genealogy and chronology are one and the same, for they most certainly are not.

In addition, there are other major points that should be made available on these topics. Observe the following information in chart form. Speaking in round figures, from the present to Jesus is 2,000 years—a matter of historical record that no one doubts. From Jesus to Abraham is 2,000 years; that, too, is a matter of historical record which is well known. Each of those figures is extractable from secular history.

Present to Jesus	2,000 years
Jesus to Abraham	2,000 years
Abraham to Adam	? years

The only figure now lacking is that representing the date from Abraham to Adam. Since we know that Adam was the first man (1 Corinthians 15:45), and since we know that man has been on the Earth “from the beginning of the creation” (Mark 10:6, the Lord speaking; Romans 1:20-21, Paul speaking), if it were possible to obtain the figures showing how long it has been from Abraham to Adam, we would have chronological information giving us the relative age of the Earth (since we know that the Earth is only five days older than man—Exodus 20:11; 31:17; Genesis 1-2).

The figure for the time span between Abraham and Adam, of course, is not obtainable from secular history, since those records were destroyed in the Great Flood. Fortunately, however, we are not dependent on the records of secular history for such information; the biblical record provides that material for us. Note the following (and this is why Luke's genealogy is so critically important in this discussion). In Luke's genealogy, he listed 55 generations between Jesus and Abraham. We know from secular history (as documented by archaeology—see Kitchen & Douglas, 1982, p. 189) that this time frame covered only about 2,000 years. Between Abraham and Adam, Luke listed only twenty generations. And no one doubts that from the present to Jesus has been about 2,000 years. So, our chart now looks like this:

Present to Jesus	2,000 years
Jesus to Abraham	(55 generations) 2,000 years
Abraham to Adam	(20 generations) ? years

From this chronological information it is an easy matter to use the 20 generations from Abraham to Adam to determine the approximate number of years contained therein. In round numbers, the figure is 2,000. That completes the chart, which then appears as follows:

Present to Jesus	2,000 years
Jesus to Abraham	(55 generations) 2,000 years
Abraham to Adam	(20 generations) 2,000 years

Of course, some have argued that there are "gaps" in the genealogies. But where, exactly, would those gaps be placed, and how would they help? Observe the following: No one can put any usable gaps between the present and the Lord's birth; secular history records that age-information for us. No one can put any usable gaps between the Lord and Abraham; secular history also records that age-information for us. The only place one could try to place any "usable" gaps (viz., usable in regard to extending the age of the Earth) would be in the 20 generations represented between Abraham and Adam. Yet note that actually there are not 20 generations available for inserting "gaps," because Jude (14) noted that "Enoch was the seventh from Adam." Examining the Old Testament genealogies establishes exactly that. Enoch was the seventh, beginning from Adam, which then provides us divinely inspired testimony (from Jude) on the accuracy of the first seven of the names. That leaves only 13 generations remaining into which any "gaps" could be placed. Wayne Jackson has observed that in order to get the Earth back only to the time of the evolutionary age of man (approximately 3.6 million years as suggested by the late Mary Leakey and her present-day colleagues), one would have to place 291,125 years in between each of the remaining 13 generations (1978). It doesn't take an overdose of either biblical knowledge or common sense to see that this quickly becomes ludicrous to the extreme for two reasons. First, who could believe (knowing anything about proper exegesis and hermeneutics) that the first seven of these generations could be so exact, and the last thirteen be so inexact? Second, what good would all of this time do anyone? All it would accomplish is the establishment of a 3.6-million-year-old Earth; evolutionists, theistic evolutionists, and progressive creationists need a 4.6-billion-year-old Earth. So, in effect, all of this inserting of "gaps" into the biblical text is much ado about nothing!

And therein lies the point. While it may be true on the one hand to say that a precise age of the Earth is unobtainable from the genealogies, at the same time let us hasten to point out that using the best

information available to us from Scripture, the genealogies hardly can be extended (via "gaps") to anything much beyond 6,000 to 7,000 years. For someone to leave the impression (even if inadvertently) that the genealogies do not contain legitimate chronological information, or that the genealogies are full of "gaps" that render them impotent, is to misrepresent the case and distort the facts.

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