

# The Antiquity of Man

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The question of the antiquity of man has no real Biblical significance. So far as the Scheme of Redemption is concerned it is matter of complete indifference how long man has been on the earth. The problem arises because of the contrast drawn by some between the “short period which seems to be allotted to human history in the Biblical narrative, and the tremendously long period which certain schools of scientific speculation have assigned to the duration of human life on earth, that theology has become interested in the topic at all” (Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 238).

## I. THE 4004 B.C. DATE FOR CREATION.

- A. The date of 4004 B.C. for creation has been found in the margin of the King James Version since A.D. 1701. It was based on a chronology devised by the Irish Archbishop of Armagh, James Ussher (1581–1656).
  1. The data used by Ussher consisted largely, “and at crucial points solely, on genealogical tables (Gen. 5 and 11), and nothing can be clearer than that it is precarious in the highest degree to draw chronological inferences from genealogical tables” (Warfield, 240).
  2. Ramm says: “Lightfoot (1602–1675), famed Hebraist of Cambridge, followed through with Ussher’s work and figured out that creation took place the week of October 18-24, 4004 B.C., with Adam created on October 23 at 9 A.M. forty-fifth meridian time. Brewster sarcastically remarks: Closer than this, as a cautious scholar, the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University did not venture to commit himself” (Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*, 174).
- B. Difficulties. “Moreover, this literal interpretation gives a date for creation which involves various difficulties. Many archaeological finds from Near Eastern sites have been unquestionably dated earlier than 4000 B.C. (for example, Jericho, Byblos, Jarmo). Also a flood at about 2300 B.C., as required by Ussher’s chronology, lacks supporting evidence even if Wooley’s discovery of the flood level at Ur (dated about 3100 B.C.) indicates more than a local inundation” (Wiseman, “The Chronology of the Bible,” *The Holman Study Bible*, 1215).

## II. WHERE IS THE DIFFICULTY?

- A. The Biblical record since the time of Abraham does not offer much difficulty. For that period we have the “long dates” such as the time between the exodus from Egypt and the building of the temple by Solomon (1 Kings 6:1), and the length of the sojourn in Egypt (Ex. 12:30; cf. Gal. 3:17). There are also extra-Biblical contemporary historical references which provide some help.
- B. There are no “long dates” from the time of the creation to the flood, or from the flood to Abraham. During this period we are dependent entirely on inferences drawn from the genealogical tables of Genesis 5 and 11. Warfield warns: “And if the Scriptural genealogies supply no solid basis for chronological inferences, it is clear that we are left without Scriptural data for forming an estimate of the duration of these ages. For aught we know they may have been of immense length” (Warfield, 240). The phrase “immense length” seems to be an overstatement of the case.

## III. THE GENEALOGIES OF GENESIS 5 AND 11.

- A. **To establish lines of descent.** “These genealogies must be esteemed trustworthy for the purposes for which they are recorded; but they cannot safely be pressed into use for other purposes for which they were not intended, and for which they are not adapted. In particular, it is clear that the genealogical purposes for which the genealogies were given, did not require a complete record of all the generations through which the descent in question comes. Accordingly it is found on examination that the genealogies of Scripture are freely compressed for all sorts of purposes; and that it can seldom be

confidently affirmed that they contain a complete record of the whole series of generations, while it is often obvious that a very large number are omitted. There is no reason inherent in the nature of the Scriptural genealogies why a genealogy of ten recorded links, as each of those in Genesis 5 and 11 is, may not represent an actual descent of a hundred or a thousand or ten thousand links.\* The point established by the table is not that these are all the links which intervened between the beginning and the closing names, but that this is the line of descent through which one traces back to or down to the other” (Warfield, 240).

\*While this view does not contradict the Scripture, it does have several difficulties associated with it; we see no necessity in holding it. Warfield went on to say that it is generally understood “that man cannot have existed on the earth more than some ten thousand to twenty thousand years” (248).

## B. There are gaps in the genealogies.

1. In Matthew 1 there is given two distinct genealogies of Jesus.
  - a. The genealogy given in verse 1 traces Jesus back to Abraham in just two steps: “Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”
  - b. The account of verses 2 - 17 expands the same genealogy to 42 persons, arranged in a threefold scheme of fourteen generations each.
2. A comparison of Matthew 1 with the Old Testament shows that there are gaps in the account.
  - a. Three kings are omitted: Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah.
  - b. Joram is said to have begotten Uzziah (vs. 8) who was actually his great-great-grandson.

## C. Age of father at birth of son.

How shall we account for the age of the father at the birth of the son? How shall we account for the life-span of the father after the birth of the son? Warfield argued that “all these items cooperate to make a vivid impression upon us of the vigor and grandeur of humanity in those old days of the world’s prime” (244). Oswald T. Allis says “The great aim of the statement seems to be to stress two things, the remarkable longevity of each patriarch both as regards the time of attaining parenthood and as to total age, and also the melancholy fact that despite the great age attained the curse pronounced in Gen. 2:17 was finally fulfilled, ‘and he died’” (*The Five Books of Moses*, 296-97).

1. It is characteristic of the genealogies of Scripture to tell some important or interesting fact about the person represented by it. Note the parenthetical statements given in Mt. 1:2, 3, 5, 6, 11.
2. Of the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11, Warfield said, “we have before us here nothing but ordinary genealogies, accompanied by parenthetical notes which are inserted for other than chronological purposes” (Warfield, 247). The genealogies serve only as a record of the line of descent of Noah from Adam and of Abraham from Noah.
3. “In a word, the Scriptural data leaves us wholly without guidance in estimating the time which elapsed between the creation of the world and the deluge and between the deluge and the call of Abraham. So far as the Scripture assertions are concerned, we may suppose any length of time to have intervened between these events which may otherwise appear reasonable” (247).
4. Allis pointed out some important features of these records (295-98).
  - a. They do not end with a total.
  - b. They are never used elsewhere in Scripture as a basis for chronological calculations.
  - c. The expression “all the generations” in Matthew 1:17 clearly means all the generations *given in these lists*.

## D. The example of Abraham shows that the genealogical records were not intended primarily for chronological purposes. See Genesis 11:26; 12:4.

1. Terah lived 70 years and became the father of (begat) Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Were they triplets? No. Was Abram the oldest of the brothers? No. Abram was the most prominent in Scripture and is named first.
2. Abram was 75 when he left Haran (Gen. 12:4), after his father was dead (Acts 7:4). Terah was 205 years old when he died (Gen. 11:32). He was approximately 130 years old when Abram was born.

## E. The genealogies of Gen. 5 and 11 differ greatly in the various texts. See Thiele, “Chronology, Old Testament,” *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, 214.

**Adam to the Flood**

1656 years  
1307 years  
2242 years

**TEXT**

Masoretic Text  
Samaritan Pentateuch  
Septuagint Text

**Flood to Abraham**

292 years  
942 years  
1172 years

**IV. SCRIPTURAL EVIDENCE THAT THESE WERE NOT ALWAYS FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIPS.**

The following examples show that *abridgement* of genealogical records was common in Scripture.

A. The term *son* may mean descendant, and not son.

1. Jesus is the *son* of David, the *son* of Abraham (Mt. 1:1).
2. Matthew 1:8 omits three names between Joram and Uzziah.

**Old Testament**

Joram (2 Kings 8:24)

Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:1)

**Matthew**

Joram (Mt. 1:8).  
Ahaziah (2 Kings 8:25).  
Joash (2 Kings 11:2).  
Amaziah (2 Kings 14:1)  
Uzziah (Mt. 1:8).

3. Matthew 1:11 omits Jehoiakim.

**Old Testament**

Josiah (2 Kings 22:1)

Jeconiah (2 Kings 24:6)

**Matthew**

Josiah  
Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:34)  
Jeconiah [Jehoiachin]

4. When the genealogy of Ezra 7:3-5 is compared with that of 1 Chron. 6:6-10, we find six names omitted between Meraioth and Azariah in Ezra's account.

**Ezra 7:3-5**

Zerahiah  
Meraioth

Azariah  
Amariah

**1 Chron. 6:6-10**

Zerahiah  
Meraioth  
Amariah  
Ahitub  
Zadok  
Ahimaaz  
Azariah  
Johanan  
Azariah  
Amariah

B. Comparison of the genealogy of Jesus in Luke with that in Genesis. Luke traces the genealogy of Jesus back to Adam and names a person not recorded by Moses in Genesis.

**Genesis 11:10-18**

Shem  
Arphaxad

Shelah  
Heber  
Peleg

**Luke 3:35-36**

Shem  
Arpachshad  
Cainan  
Shelah  
Eber  
Peleg

1. Luke apparently used a genealogical table which was different from the one in Genesis which is based on the Masoretic Text. "Clearly this indicates that there is at least one name omitted by Moses in the Genesis account. And if there is one omission, is it not possible that there are more?" (Klotz).
2. Cainan, who lived 130 years and begat Shelah, is listed in the Septuagint text of Genesis 11:13.

## V. HOW LONG HAS MAN BEEN ON THE EARTH?

- A. The Time of Creation. The Bible only says “in the beginning.” There is no further commitment.
- B. The Bible does indicate that man has been on the earth for a few thousand years rather than a few million. Genesis 4 presents a clear indication of cultural development soon after the creation of man.
1. City building: Enoch “built a city” (Gen. 4:17).
  2. Culture, Musical instruments: Jubal was the father of all such as “handle the harp and pipe” (Gen. 4:21).
  3. Metallurgy: Tubalcain was “the forger of every cutting instrument of brass [copper] and iron” (Gen. 4:22).
- C. Archaeological and anthropological evidence.
1. “Recent archaeological studies in the Near East suggest that the first indications of sedentary life in that area are to be dated between 9000 and 7000 B.C. In addition, the oldest known city, Jericho, is dated to this period. These computations are based on nuclear techniques whose uncorroborated results beyond 3000 or 4000 B.C. must be used with some caution” (J. N. Oswalt, “Chronology of the OT,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, I:675).
  2. “Between 3000 and 2000 BC all Near Eastern dates are subject to greater uncertainty, of up to two centuries, largely because they are inadequately linked to later dates. Before 3000 BC, all dates are reasoned estimates only, and are subject to several centuries’ margin of error, increasing with distance in time” (Kitchen and Mitchell, “Chronology of the Old Testament,” *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 189).
  3. The advanced civilizations of the ancient Near East.
    - a. Mesopotamian culture developed about 3500 B.C. Sumerian inscriptions go back as early as 3000 B.C.
    - b. Egyptian culture developed about 3200 B.C. The great pyramids were constructed during the fourth dynasty (about 2500 B.C.).
  4. Ussher’s dating of the flood in the middle of the 24th century B.C. could not be possible. The cultural developments in Mesopotamia and Egypt, for which we have information, must have taken place after the flood.

## CONCLUSION:

1. An absolute chronology is not possible. “Because of the difficulties involved, it must be admitted that the construction of an absolute chronology from Adam to Abraham is not now possible on the basis of the available data” (Thiele, “Chronology, Old Testament,” *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, 214).
2. A span of 5000 to 8000 years between Adam and Abraham seems reasonable (cf. Archer, “The Chronology of the Old Testament,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, I:361; Clark, “Evolution,” *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, 203-04).
3. The Genesis account of the period from Creation to Abraham is not to be considered mythical, but as historically accurate.
  - a. Jesus gave His approval of the creation account (Mt. 19:4-5).
  - b. Adam and Eve are historical characters (Rom. 5:12ff.; 1 Cor. 15:21-22; Lk. 3; 1 Tim. 2:13-14; 2 Cor. 11:3), as is Cain (1 Jn. 3:12).
  - c. Abel, Enoch, and Noah are presented as parallel to Abraham and those who followed him (Heb. 11).
  - d. The flood is presented as an historical event (Mt. 24:37-39; 1 Pet. 3:20-21; 2 Pet. 3:6).