

BIBLICAL GENEALOGIES

When it comes to studying the early chapters of the book of Genesis, the genealogies, particularly in chapter 5, are often a stumbling block to many. Here is some useful information that I discovered many years ago that may hopefully give some introductory help towards a better understanding of biblical genealogies.

The following extract is taken from a book entitled *Times of the Signs* by George T. Curle, (New Wine Press 1988) pp.199-205.

Genealogies of the Bible

Dr. W.H. Green, late professor of Old Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary and a contributor to the famous Fundamental papers, has succinctly analyzed the genealogies of the Bible. He concluded that they were not intended and cannot be legitimately used to construct a chronology. His conclusions have been collaborated by other biblical scholars. The arguments against the chronological treatment of the biblical genealogies can be summarized in the following three points:

1. Abridgement and omission of unimportant names is the pattern in the genealogies of the Bible. There are numerous examples of this observation. One prime example is the omissions in the genealogies of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 1:8 Ahaziah (2 Kings 8:25), Joash (2 Kings 7:1), and Amaziah (2 Kings 23:34; 1 Chronicles 3:16) are dropped between Joram and Ozias (or Uzziah). In Matthew 1:1 the entire genealogy of Jesus is summed up in two steps, "Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham."

The genealogy in Exodus 6:16-25 makes Moses the great-grandson of Levi though 430 years intervened (Exodus 12:40). It is, therefore, evident that many names have been omitted from Moses' genealogy.

Another convincing proof is found in Numbers 3:19, 27-28.

Four sons of Kohath, or grandsons of Levi, appear respectively to give rise to the families of the Amramites, Izharites, Hebronites, and Uzzielites. The number of males in these families one month and upward was 8600 only one year after the Exodus. It is inconceivable to assume that the father of Moses had given birth to 8600 descendants of the male sex alone, and 2750 of them were between the ages of 30 and 50 (Numbers 4:36).

2. Genealogies include significant names. Biblical writers did not have chronology in mind when they wrote the genealogies. The four women listed in the genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1) - Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah - were not counted in Matthew's final tabulation of generations. The listing of these women was contrary to the Jewish custom. Yet each of these women were remarkable in some way. Three were once guilty of gross sin, and Ruth was of Gentile origin. This seems to indicate that Matthew did not simply copy the genealogical history of

Joseph. He seemed to have a specific purpose in mind, and he omitted what did not suit the purpose or added what did.

The genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 pertain to the generations elapsed from Adam to the Flood and from the Flood to Abraham, respectively. There is no passage in the Bible specifying the total length of time that actually transpired from Adam to the Flood and from the Flood to Abraham. ...The absence of recorded elapsed time from Adam to Abraham suggests that this was an indefinite period of time on which Moses was not given exact information by God.

The structures of the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 seem to be symmetrical. Each genealogy includes 10 names; Noah is 10 persons from Adam, and Terah is 10 persons from Noah. Each ends with a father having 3 sons, and the Cainite genealogy ends this way also (Genesis 4:17-22).

The absence of accurately recorded time from Adam to Abraham and the symmetrical structures of the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 are highly suggestive of intentional arrangement in a form similar to that of Matthew. If one assumes that a long period of time elapsed between Adam and Abraham, the meager biblical record of events that transpired during this period is not surprising, for it is not uncommon for Scripture to pass over long periods of time with little or no remark. For example, the greater part of the 430 years of the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt is left blank in sacred history.

3. "Father," "Son," and "begot" were used in a broad sense. Several Biblical passages contain ancestral titles used in a broad sense. We know from earlier discussion that several names have been omitted in Matthew 1:8 after Joram. Therefore, Joram was actually the great-great grandfather of Uzziah. It is obvious that the "father" used in verse 8 between Joram and Uzziah means "ancestor" instead of its conventional meaning. In 1 Chronicles 1:36 the Hebrew text includes seven names after "the sons of Eliphaz," making it appear that all the seven named are sons. Actually one of the names, Timna, was that of a concubine, not a son. Only the New International Version translates clearly that Timna was Eliphaz's concubine, as recorded also in Genesis 36:11-12, and the other six are sons.

Matthew 1:1 reads, "Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham." "Son" here obviously means descendant. Therefore, the biblical writers and translators seem to use the words "father" and "son" freely to mean "ancestor" or "descendant", and sometimes the persons are not closely related.

The regular formula in the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 10 is "A lived _ years and begat B, and A lived after he begat B _ years and begat sons and daughters. And B lived _ years and begat C...." (KJV). The Hebrew word "begat" is sometimes used for succeeding generations. Zilpah is said to have "born to" Jacob her great-grandchildren (Genesis 46:18 NIV) and Bilhah her grandchildren (Genesis 46:25). Canaan is recorded to have begotten whole nations (Genesis 10: 15-18).

Furthermore, if the dates are true, Adam was contemporary with every generation until the Flood, except Noah. Methuselah died in the year of the Flood. Shem survived Abraham for 35 years; Salah 3 years; and Eber, 64 years. For 58 years Noah was the contemporary of Abraham, and Shem actually survived Abraham for

35 years. Such conclusions are contrary to the spirit of the record that presupposed a much longer gap between Noah and Abraham.

W.H. Green concluded his paper with the following statement: "On these various grounds we conclude that the Scriptures furnish no data for a chronological computation prior to the life of Abraham, and that the Mosaic records do not fix and were not intended to fix the precise date either of the Flood or the creation of the world." Thus the purpose of the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 seems to be more to show the effect of sin on the human vitality and longevity rather than to establish chronology. In the formula discussed above, B could be the literal son of a distant descendant, and the age of A may be his age at the birth of the child from whom B was descended. This may allow centuries, millenniums, or hundreds of thousands of years to intervene between A and B.

The proponents of a recent creation have revised their date of creation back to 10,000 BC or so because of these arguments. However, they will not make any further concession, for this would introduce too large a gap into the genealogies. However, it is entirely personal preference and not based on any exegetical data.

Bible passages referring to 'the last days (times)' (Matthew 28:20; Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2; 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20; 1 John 2:18) and the promise of Jesus' imminent return (Revelation 1:3; 22:10; 12:20) fit in nicely with the assumption that humans have existed for hundreds of thousands of years prior to Christ's first coming. The use of 'last days' implies that the major part of the world's history has been finished. The passages indicate that Christ's coming is to be expected within a short period, yet over 2000 years have passed since the promises. When contrasted with the thousands of years people have existed on earth, it is a short time. However, the passages are far-fetched if it is assumed that created life has existed for only 4000 - 10,000 years, because one would be forced to interpret the 'last days' to mean the last one-half to one-fifth of the created order. This assumption seems to misread the 'last days' passages.