

## Questions about the ages recorded in Genesis

**If man lived for over 900 years in the time of Adam, what happened to shorten life expectancy to something like 40 years in Christ's time?**

**How Could Adam Live 930 Years?**

**How long was a year considered to be? Noah lived to be 900 + years? Would each year possibly be a few months?**

*I'm delighted to have this question. It's often asked and your asking allows for others to receive a response for the question they would ask.*

*The numbers in the Bible are often occasions for questioning. That's why I put the Numbers Principle in my opening presentation. They do not generally present math, but meaning.*

*That having been said, there are serious scholarly attempts at an explanation. I'm going to append one approach from a helpful book, Hard Sayings of the Bible. See if you find this helpful.*

*I could share the whole book on PDF if you would like. It's quite long.*

*Everyone who reads the list of the ten people who lived before the Flood in Genesis 5 and the list of ten patriarchs who lived after the flood in Genesis 11 is immediately struck by the longevity of these patriarchs. **How is it possible that these people were able to live so long?** That is essentially your question.*

*In addition, we are amazed to the point of disbelief by the ages at which they were still able to father children. Noah became a proud father at a mere 500 years (Gen 5:32)!*

*From Hard Sayings of the Bible:*

The question of the possible reconciliation of the results of scientific inquiry and the claims of Scripture could not be more challenging. The claims for the long lives and the ages at which these men were able to sire children is enough to lead to a distrust of the Scriptures almost from the very first chapters of the Bible.

In fact, so notoriously difficult are the problems presented by the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 that they have been paraded for centuries as prime examples of chronological impossibilities in the Bible. A resolution for the kinds of issues raised here are found, however, in an understanding of the writer's method.

In April 1890, William Henry Green of the Princeton faculty wrote an article in *Bibliotheca Sacra* pointing to some clear principles used by the writers of Scripture in the construction of genealogies. Those principles include the following:

1. Abridgment is the general rule because the sacred writers did not want to encumber their pages with more names than necessary.

2. Omissions in genealogies are fairly routine. For example, Matthew 1:8 omits three names between Joram and Ozias (Uzziah); namely, Ahaziah (2 Kings 8:25), Joash (2 Kings 12:1) and Amaziah (2 Kings 14:1). In verse 11, Matthew omits Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:34). In fact, in Matthew 1:1 the whole of two millennia are summed up in two giant steps: “Jesus Christ, the son of David [about 1000 B.C.], the son of Abraham [about 2000 B.C.]”

3. The span of a biblical “generation” is more than our twenty to thirty years. In Syriac it equals eighty years. Often in the Exodus account a generation is 100 to 120 years.

4. The meanings of *begat*, *son of*, *father of* and even *bore a son* often have special nuances, as the context often indicates. To *beget* often means no more than “to become the ancestor of.” To be *the father of* often means being a grandfather or great-grandfather. The point is that the next key person was descended from that male named “father” in the text.

The most instructive lesson of all can be gleaned from Kohath’s descent into Egypt (Gen 46:6–11) some 430 years (Ex 12:40) before the exodus. Now if Moses (one in the Kohath line) was 80 years old at the time of the exodus (Ex 7:7), and no gaps (such as are suggested by the above-mentioned principles) are understood (as we believe the evidence above now forces us to concede), then the “grandfather” of Moses had in Moses’ lifetime 8,600 descendants. Amazing as that might seem, here is the real shocker: 2,750 of those 8,600 descendants were males between the ages of 30 and 50 (Num 3:19, 27–28, 34; 4:36)! **It is difficult to believe that the writers of Scripture were that naive.** (My highlight.)

The form that Genesis 5 and 11 use, with few exceptions, is a stereotypic formula giving the age of the patriarch at the birth of his son, the number of years that he lived after the birth of that son, and then the total number of years that he lived until he died. It is the question of the function of these numbers that attracts our attention here.

Since Zilpah is credited with “bearing” (*yalad*) her grandchildren (Gen 46:18) and Bilhah is said to “bear” (*yalad*) her grandchildren as well (Gen 46:25), it is clear that a legitimate usage of these numbers in the genealogies might well mean that B was a distant relative of A. In this case, the age of A is the age at the birth of that (unnamed) child from whom B (eventually) descended.

The ages given for the “father” when the “son” was born must be actual years, as we shall presently see. The conflation takes place not at the point of supplying the actual years at which the father had a child; it is instead at the point where the name of the next noteworthy descendant is given instead of the immediate son. The ages given function as an indicator of the fact that the effects of the Fall into sin had not yet affected human generative powers as seriously as they have more recently. The same point, of course, is to be made with regard to human longevity. The fact that the record wishes to stress is the sad mortality of men and women as a result of the sin in the Garden of Eden. The repeated litany “and he died” echoes from the pages like the solemn toll of a funeral bell.

There’s more to the answer, if you would like to see it. The book *Hard Sayings of the Bible* is also in the church library, I believe.