

The Gem of Genealogies

¹ This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. ² He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. ³ And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. ⁴ After he begot Seth, the days of Adam were eight hundred years; and he had sons and daughters. ⁵ So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died. ⁶ Seth lived one hundred and five years, and begot Enosh. ⁷ After he begot Enosh, Seth lived eight hundred and seven years, and had sons and daughters. ⁸ So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died. ⁹ Enosh lived ninety years, and begot Cainan. ¹⁰ After he begot Cainan, Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years, and had sons and daughters. ¹¹ So all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died. ¹² Cainan lived seventy years, and begot Mahalalel. ¹³ After he begot Mahalalel, Cainan lived eight hundred and forty years, and had sons and daughters. ¹⁴ So all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died. ¹⁵ Mahalalel lived sixty-five years, and begot Jared. ¹⁶ After he begot Jared, Mahalalel lived eight hundred and thirty years, and had sons and daughters. ¹⁷ So all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years; and he died. ¹⁸ Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years, and begot Enoch. ¹⁹ After he begot Enoch, Jared lived eight hundred years, and had sons and daughters. ²⁰ So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years; and he died. ²¹ Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. ²² After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. ²³ So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. ²⁴ And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. ²⁵ Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years, and begot Lamech. ²⁶ After he begot Lamech, Methuselah lived seven hundred and eighty-two years, and had sons and daughters. ²⁷ So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years; and he died. ²⁸ Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and had a son. ²⁹ And he called his name Noah, saying, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed." ³⁰ After he begot Noah, Lamech lived five hundred and ninety-five years, and had sons and daughters. ³¹ So all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years; and he died. ³² And Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Genesis 5:1–32)

People sometimes speak of how tedious or boring they find the genealogies of the Bible. But people don't find genealogies boring, if the genealogy includes their name. In the last few decades, there has been booming interest in genealogies fuelled by websites like Ancestry.com, MyHeritage.com. It used to be the eccentric interest of royalty and nobility and of a few odd cults, who have an obsession with genealogies. But in an anonymous and disconnected world, people are becoming more interested in where they came from, their heritage, even their ethnic origins.

But none of us have our own names in these genealogies, and these can be some of those portions of Scripture that seem odd to us. In fact, there are about 25 genealogies in the Bible, most in the Tanakh, 2 in the New Testament. There's no real parallel in ancient literature, there are relatively few genealogies in Sumerian and ancient Akkadian sources. So the Bible seems more interested in genealogies than we are. When we come to these, we are tempted to just skip to the next chapter, because there doesn't seem to be anything here: no promises, no commands, no examples to follow, no action, just lists of unfamiliar names.

At this point, we have to remember that the promise of the Bible is that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness. If all Scripture is God-breathed, then that extends to the genealogies. And if all Scripture is profitable, useful, then that extends to the genealogies. It just takes a more careful, thoughtful look, to see why genealogies can be gems in the rough. A skilled mechanic can show us a very grimy, ordinary piece of an engine and explain to us why it is crucial to the whole thing. A doctor can point to a very ordinary-looking part of human anatomy and show us why it is critical to health. But we would have ignored or skipped over those things. Here we have to trust the promise that all Scripture is helpful, even if not at first glance.

And when we look more closely, this genealogy does indeed teach us. It gives us at least three certainties for us to believe in and trust in.

I. The Certainty of the Biblical Record

The first certainty that we can bank on, is that the Bible is here giving us historical fact, not mythological legend. Notice the first line is that this is the book of. This is a record, originally oral, but then written down.

This record records historical facts. The Bible intends for us to understand Adam as an historical person, and Noah as an historical person, and this gives us the exact chronology from Adam to Noah. Both of them are fathers of the entire human race: Adam by being the original progenitor of humanity, and Noah, because he was the chosen man to come through the Flood with his family and repopulate the earth. We are all descended from Noah, and through this line back to Adam. This genealogy bridges the time span from creation to the Flood.

Now one of the ways that the Bible intends to indicate that this is a chronology is through the repeated formula here of four things: 1) The person's name 2) His age at the birth of his son 3) The remaining years lived 4) His age at death. The exact names, the exact ages provide an unbreakable link. This genealogy is what is known as a linear genealogy – the ages given when the son was born means there do not seem to be any gaps here, it is meant to be understood as a sequence of links. Not all genealogies are like that. The other kind is what's called a segmented genealogy, where the writer skips generation and names, because he wants to group them in memorable sections, like fourteen, or because he wants to place a particular person in a prominent place. The list of Jacob's sons moves names around so that Joseph occupies the seventh position, similarly with Boaz in Ruth 4. Moses is the seventh from Abraham, and using Luke's genealogy, Jesus is the seventy-seventh from Adam.

But here, the genealogy appears to be linear, and gives us ten names from Adam to Noah. These are meant to be understood as actual, historical people. It is meant to show with precision how people continued to live from Adam until Noah, even during tumultuous and evil times.

And implicitly, it also seems to describe the preservation of a line of people who had begun to call on the name of the Lord. After describing Cain's exile, his culture, and the evil Lamech, notice the next verse.

²⁶ And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then *men* began to call on the name of the LORD. (Genesis 4:26)

Now that verse is cryptic, but it suggests it was only during Seth's life and the life of his son Enosh, that there was a return to God. Perhaps chapter 5 describes the line of those who called on the name of the Lord. We have already studied the unusual life of Enoch, who walked with God in a world that did not. It seems reasonable to suggest that this line of people preserved faith in the true God, from Adam, till Noah.

Exact names, ages, names of children, age at death is meant to tell us that this is history. In fact, that's the point that the writer of Hebrews is making about Melchizedek when he says he had no father or mother. I don't think he's saying Melchizedek was a supernatural being. He's saying just about everyone who's someone in Genesis has a kind of ID card with name, birth, name of parents, and name of children. You can place them and trace them. With Melchizedek, he just kind shows up, pops into the narrative, which makes him a picture of someone eternal and ageless: Messiah

Jesus.

But at this point we should face the objection. If this genealogy is giving us actual history, real people, an actual family tree of Seth to Noah, then what about these enormous lifespans? The average age here is 912. Methuselah lived the longest, to 969. They lived so long, that most of them lived at the same time as each other. Adam lived long enough to know Lamech, Noah's father. In fact, all of them, besides Adam and Seth, were alive when Noah was alive. The total time, from Adam to Noah, using the years given here is 1656 years. I should add, that in the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, the lifespans are the same, but in the case of six of the patriarchs, it has them 100 years older at their son's birth. That enlarges the time from Adam to Noah by about 600 years, which would push creation's date back to about 5500 BC and the Flood at 3200 BC.

But regardless of that, we are still dealing with what sounds like ages beyond fantasy. Nine hundred years old? Some have suggested that instead of years, these refer to months. But that is ridiculous, because it then means most of these men had their children at around age 10 or 11. Others have suggested they are symbolic. But symbolic for what? When numbers are this precise, with no rounding up or down, they don't seem to have a symbolic value.

Also, while the ages are much longer than modern day ages, they are not unthinkable. For example, in the Sumerian chronicles they have eight kings whose lifespans total 241 000 years. By contrast 1656 years, or even the Septuagint's 2262 years is pretty modest by comparison. Not only so, but the Bible shows a declining lifespan after the Flood that eventually stabilises to our current typical lifespan. Shem's son Noah lives 600 years. But from there, the lifespans become 430, 370, 330, 209, 170, 140, until Joseph lives 110 years, and Moses 120. It is not as if the Bible just keeps giving fantastic lifespans to its heroes, or else we'd expect Moses to live 1000, and David 500. Clearly something was different before and after the Flood.

Actually, scientists who study longevity have found that the cells of the human body, in theory could replicate themselves indefinitely. But what happens instead, is something called the telomeres are almost like a timer on the cell. They shorten each time the cell replicates. Eventually, they are too short to allow the cell to divide. The result is aging and eventually death. In theory, if the telomeres did not shorten, the cells would replace themselves indefinitely, and you would never die.

For some reason, the people before the Flood aged very slowly, or their cells were able to replicate without genetic mutations like ours. We don't know why.

Some have speculated it was a vastly different environment before the Flood: more tropical, a higher air pressure overall, richer atmosphere, less UV rays, less diseases and germs. Some have speculated that it has to do with what are called genetic bottlenecks: when the population is reduced to eight people, as it was during the Flood, you greatly reduce genetic variety, so you increase the amount of genetic mutations, and harmful variations that reduce lifespans. In the end, we don't know. But we've reached a point in the science of gerontology, where scientists believe the first person who will live to 1000 years has already been born. Now it's strange that people believe it will happen in the future, but they have trouble believing it did happen in the past.

Now since I believe the Bible when it says in Isaiah 51:6 that the world itself grows old like a garment, I believe that the environment in which we live has aged, and is showing wear and tear. We see it in the climate, we see it in the growing volatility of natural disasters. The earth is aging, and as it ages, it becomes less conducive to long, healthy life. The earth, in its youth, supported people who lived nine hundred years.

So the first thing that genealogies give us is history. There is certainty here. These people actually lived, had children, and died. As strange as their world and lifespans are to us, file this under factual history, not wishful mythology.

But in a strange and opposite way, this genealogy give us another certainty.

II. The Certainty of Death

There is one thing common to each of these names. After every one of them, bar one, comes the dismal phrase, “and he died”. One word in the Hebrew, *va-yamot*. There is only one exception to this sad refrain, and that is Enoch, whom we considered last time, who was translated, received to Heaven without death. He along with Elijah, are the only ones to never have died. Some believe that the two witnesses of Revelation who prophesy during the last days, who warn the world will actually be Enoch and Elijah, because both of them are slain, and therefore experience what is appointed unto men: to die once.

But apart from the blessed relief of the one exception, the chapter, some have said sounds like the tolling of funeral bells. And he died, and he died.

Here we have the fulfilment of Gods warning from chapter 2:15 “*but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*” (Genesis 2:16–17), and of the judgement he passed on Adam in chapter 3: “*In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.*” (Genesis 3:19)

Here is the certainty of death. As Romans 5:12 puts it : “*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—*” (Romans 5:12)

And it is particularly instructive to see the certainty of death, even upon these people who came within reach of living 1000 years, Methuselah just 31 years away. But as a day in the Lord's sight is as a thousand years, it's as if the Lord would not let man even reach one heavenly day, as if to say, even at your peak of your powers, your fallen lives will not even be a full workday to the angels.

We spend so many of our years pretending it will not be us. That perhaps death's 100% success rate will miss us. Moses wrote only one Psalm that we know of, and it seems he wrote it toward the end of his long life, a life where he spent 40 years a prince in Egypt, 40 years a shepherd in the wilderness, and 40 years leading a wandering and complaining people.

¹⁰The days of our lives *are* seventy years;
And if by reason of strength *they are* eighty years,
Yet their boast *is* only labor and sorrow;
For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

¹¹Who knows the power of Your anger?
For as the fear of You, *so is* Your wrath.

¹²So teach *us* to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.

What did Moses suggest? Help us to not pretend we are not going to die. Help us to sense the limitation on our days. Help us to then sense the preciousness of life, and the importance of living for eternity, of being prepared to face our Maker. Lord, let us not live as if our years are an unlimited resource. One man said, you're not really living, unless you know what you want written on your tombstone. To know your life will end, and they will then summarise you in a sentence.

What do you want that sentence to be?

It is sobering and helpful to be brought, even by a genealogy to remember the certainty of death. As Qohelet, the Preacher of Ecclesiastes tells us

² Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting, For that *is* the end of all men; And the living will take *it* to heart. (Ecclesiastes 7:2)

As a gravestone in an old British cemetery not far from Windsor Castle reads the inscription:

Pause, my friend, as you walk by;

As you are now, so once was I;

As I am now, so you will be:

Prepare, my friend, to follow me!

And he died. And he died.

But I'm glad to say that is not the only thing this genealogy gives us. It gives us the certainty of the biblical record, it gives us the certainty of death. But here the minor key of this music changes to a major, and we hear music that wipes our tears and strengthens our hearts.

III. The Certainty of Hope

Hope. The rock-solid belief that God is for us, and will bring grace and redemption if we look to Him. Where is hope in this genealogy? Some have seen the hope in the actual names. Chuck Missler for example, says that the names add up to a kind of sentence. "Man is appointed mortal sorrow, the blessed God shall come down teaching, his death shall bring the despairing comfort."

Now, that is possible, but Hebrew names are notoriously difficult to translate. For example, the list of names could also come out as Ground Appointed Frailty, Sorrow Praising God Go Down Initiating the Man of Spear Despairing Rest. So much rises on how a word turns, that though I'd be excited if these names added up to a kind of gospel code embedded in the narrative, I'm not going to bank my life on that. If it's the case, more praise to God.

But I think the certainty of hope is found in even more obvious and explicit ways in this genealogy. Actually, it is at the beginning, the middle, and the end.

At the beginning, we are reminded of mankind's high dignity and place in the universe.

This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. ² He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. ³ And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a *son* in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.

We are reminded that Adam was not merely one of the animals, but the image-bearer, the standard-bearer of the Creator. Man is a hybrid creature: part physical, part spiritual. We were imparted language, words, so as to reason, love, create, and subdue creation for God's glory. We were made not in God's physical likeness, but in His personal likeness, with mind, affections, wisdom, freedom of choice. Verse 2 tells us this image is equally shared by male and female, both male and female are called mankind.

But look at the good news of verse 3. Adam begets a son, Seth. We know Seth is born after the Fall, after sin has entered. Seth replaces Abel after Cain murders him. But yet notice. Adam begets a son

in his own likeness. And yet, Adam was made in God's likeness. That means Seth, and all the other descendants, are still in God's image. Yes, the image is marred; it is distorted; it needs redemption and repairing. But it is not erased. God's crown creation still bears His image and God is not done with him. The hope that the blessing God gave Adam and Eve is not entirely lost, but still passes down to each generation its hope, echoing down to each generation.

The genealogy says: hope is certain, because we are image-bearers of God.

The next instance of hope occurs in the seventh generation, with our friend Enoch.

²² After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. ²³ So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. ²⁴ And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. (Genesis 5:22–24)

Enoch had a covenant relationship with God of loving communion. He talked with God, and lived a kind of life where he kept in step with God's will and commandments. Such was his life that, God eventually took him.

Here is hope. God notices the one who seeks to walk with Him. God notices the one who does not go with the crowd. Though all the world had corrupted itself, according to chapter 6, though the world was full of immorality and violence, Enoch chose to live an exceptional life, He lived a life of separation and consecration. And God noticed. God took Him.

Now, if this line represents the line that called on the name of the Lord, then it is true that God did not do this for all of them, and there is no promise that He will. There is a promise in Scripture that when the Lord returned He will catch up to Himself those who are still alive on the Earth. But overwhelmingly, here is hope that those who live in close fellowship with God are known and noticed by God, and according to His discretion, rewarded. ⁹ For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of *those* whose heart *is* loyal to Him. .” (2 Chronicles 16:9)

The genealogy says: hope is certain because people who walk with God are known and noticed by God.

The final note of hope comes at the end. Once again, like in chapter 4, we here have a Lamech making a statement. But this is not a godless, arrogant Lamech. This is a godly man, bearing the same name.

²⁸ Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and had a son. ²⁹ And he called his name Noah, saying, “This *one* will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed.” (Genesis 5:28–29)

Lamech calls his son, Noah, which means rest. Perhaps Lamech knew something through prophecy that the Flood was coming, perhaps this was simply his earnest desire, but he saw in his son some kind of fulfilment of the promised deliverer. Remember back in chapter 3:15, God promised a Redeemer who would crush the serpent, and thereby reverse the curse. ¹⁵ And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

Undoubtedly, every generation heard that promise and prophecy repeated to them. Perhaps they thought the Snake-Crusher would arrive in their generation, and defeat the growing forces of satanic perversion in the world.

And Noah turned out to be a deliverer, a saviour, of a different kind. Noah delivered the human race from perishing completely under the Flood of God's judgement. The genealogy tells us, God eventually judges evil, and delivers the righteous. You can hope, because however evil the world gets, there is salvation for those who repent and believe on God and His Messiah, and eventual reckoning for those who defy and mock God. The New Testament tells us that the Ark is really a picture of salvation in Messiah Jesus. Those who enter Him, trust in Him for deliverance from their sins, will find deliverance, salvation and redemption from the Flood of God's judgement. And in that sense, that sentence truly comes alive, doesn't it? Man is appointed mortal sorrow, the blessed God shall come down teaching, his death shall bring the despairing comfort.

Hope because we are image-bearers. Hope because walking with God brings His reward. Hope because God's grace through the Ark of His Son saves the righteous, and God's justice puts a stop to evil.

The certainty of hope lies alongside the two other certainties. The certainty of the biblical record: God doesn't lie or make mistakes, and the certainty of death. It is coming to all. Have you then accepted the hope that is in Christ? Have you taken His extended hand in the Snake-Crushing, Serpent Slaying Messiah?