

WHY A COMMITMENT TO INERRANCY DOES NOT DEMAND A STRICTLY 6000-YEAR-OLD EARTH: ONE YOUNG EARTHER'S PLEA FOR REALISM

by
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The young-earth creationist community is in the midst of an identity crisis relative to the age of the earth. Some within the community aggressively defend a strict 6,000-year-old creation and chafe even at minimal deviation on this point. For these, a rigid *terminus a quo* for the age of the universe is the simplest and best arbiter for establishing one's young-earth creationist credentials. Conceding even a slightly older universe is for this group equal to (1) discarding or at the very least compromising biblical inerrancy² and (2) granting philosophical independence to the sciences, whether astronomy, geology, biology, or archeology.³

This rigidity has not always existed in the young-earth community. John Whitcomb, patriarch of young-earth creationism and co-author of the groundbreaking work *The Genesis Flood*, defended a span of 3,000 to 5,000 years between the Flood and Abraham, offering a probable date for the original creation of between 6,700 B.C. and 8,700 B.C.⁴

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²Travis R. Freeman argues, for instance, that those who allow for gaps in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 are guilty of “a violation of...an inerrant view” of Scripture, and suggest that proponents of gaps are not among “those who trust the Bible” (“Do the Genesis 5 and 11 Genealogies Contain Gaps?” in *Coming to Grips with Genesis*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury [Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008], 283, 308).

³Freeman argues later in the same that the proposal of gaps in the Genesis 11 chronology points “no doubt” to “widespread acceptance of Lyellian geology and Darwinian biology...rather than sound hermeneutical principles” (*ibid.*, 307). Though he recognizes that some who recognize gaps argue only for a few thousand years while others argue for billions, he insists that they all argue alike from unbiblical presuppositions (see, e.g., the wide range of “evangelical scholars” who affirm gaps in *ibid.*, 286–89).

Similarly, Larry Pierce and Ken Ham, who also defend a strict 6000-year-old universe, assert that proponents of a 10,000-year-old earth uniformly use evidence that is “just as flimsy...as the evidence for long ages” (“Are There Gaps in the Genesis Genealogies?” in *The New Answers Book 2*, ed. Hen Ham [Green Forest, AR: Master Books], 60).

⁴John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Phillipsburg, NJ):

While Whitcomb and others of his generation held tenaciously to a young earth of thousands rather than billions of years,⁵ the *sine qua non* of their movement was not a rigid date, but adherence to other interpretive factors, including:

- Belief in a recent and immediate creation of the universe in six literal, successive, 24-hour days.
- Belief in a catastrophic global flood as the principal dynamic for explaining the geological and fossil records.
- Belief in a literal, historical, and immediately created Adam, prior to whose fall death was absent in the universe.⁶

These factors, early young-earth creationists agreed, together insulated Genesis 1–11 from the philosophical threats of modernism and uniformitarianism that threatened biblical authority. Viewing the earth as young was important to these pioneering modern creationists, but an exact identification of the earth's age was neither necessary nor even possible—the Bible simply did not supply this level of precision. And so, irrespective of whether they favored a 6,000-, 10,000-, or 25,000-year-old earth, proponents of this new movement readily set aside this minor quibble in the interest of a united front against the ridicule and arguments of scientists, archaeologists, and scholars from other disciplines who argued for “deep time.”

This article is a plea for the young-earth creationist community to return to this older standard of fellowship. It proceeds on the assumption that there *are* evangelical stances on the age of the earth that do not honor the bedrock principle of biblical inerrancy. However, it also argues the possibility of affirming, *without abandoning a clear and normal reading of the text or surrendering to the dictates of uniformitarianism*, something other than a strict 6000-year-old earth. In short, this article is a warranted request for the young-earth community to recognize and make unqualified place in its ranks for the excluded middle of young-earthers who argue, based on (1) commonly accepted exegetical techniques and (2) other non-uniformitarian grounds, for a modest relaxation of the 6000-year benchmark for the age of the earth.

Presbyterian & Reformed, 1961), 489. I was delighted, after conversing personally about this topic with Dr. Whitcomb, to receive access to a prepublication copy of an essay that he has prepared to address this issue: “The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11.” I lean heavily on this essay for portions of this article.

⁵Whitcomb goes on to qualify his estimate of the earth's age by opining that “even the allowance of 5,000 years between the Flood and Abraham stretches Genesis 11 almost to the breaking point” (ibid.). Clearly there is no room here for the deep time that uniformitarian science demands.

⁶There is no universally accepted, “official” list of such delimiters. I offer these as a modest proposal to that end, but recognize that they could be multiplied and/or refined.

THE BASIS FOR THE INFLEXIBLE 6000-YEAR-OLD EARTH THEORY

The centerpiece of the argument for a 6000-year-old earth is the identification of the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 as gapless “chronogenealogies.” Proponents argue that the precise numbers and calculations unique to these two genealogies reveal unmistakably the divine intention to supply a meticulous and comprehensive timeline of the world from Adam to Abram.⁷ While a modest relaxation of this stance might not immediately upend the young earth model, proponents argue, even the slightest tinkering with the numbers represents the proverbial camel’s nose in the tent—a slippery slope upon which misadventurers tend to slide into the yawning chasm of biblical errancy and “deep time.”

It is not my intention to detail all of the arguments for gapless chronogenealogies. Proponents have long since made their case and have offered little by way of new arguments for years. But I do not intend, either, to denigrate the gapless chronogenealogy theory. Instead, I simply wish to create reasonable doubt concerning this theory—doubt reasonable enough to allow modest dissenters full membership in the YEC guild.

THE CASE FOR REASONABLE DOUBT ABOUT THE INFLEXIBLE 6000-YEAR-OLD EARTH THEORY

The 6000-year-earth position may be questioned on several grounds, some more substantial than others. I would like to suggest, though, that while all of the arguments developed below are load-bearing, the intertextual-exegetical arguments take pride of place in the ensuing material.

Logical Tensions

The 6000-year-old-earth model rests, at least in part, on a slippery slope argument: “Conceding a few extra centuries today means that the camel’s nose is in the tent, resulting inevitably in the acceptance of billions of years tomorrow.” Before proceeding, I cordially concede that slippery slope arguments are sometimes dismissed too readily for their logical fallacy. While in their most unqualified form slippery slope arguments are fallacious, it does not follow that it is wrong to sound the

⁷See, e.g., James B. Jordan, “The Biblical Chronology Question: An Analysis,” *Creation Social Science and Humanities Quarterly* 2 (1979):1–6; Richard Niessen, “A Biblical Approach to Dating the Earth: A Case for the use of Genesis 5 and 11 as Exact Chronology,” *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 19 (June 1982): 60–67; David T. Rosvear, “The Genealogies of Genesis,” in *Concepts in Creationism*, ed. E. H. Andrews, Werner Gitt, and W. J. Ouweneel (Welwyn, England: Evangelical Press, 1986): 68–77; S. R. Kulling, *Are the Genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 Historical and Complete, That Is, Without Gaps?* (Riehen, Switzerland: Immanuel-Verlag, 1996); Jonathan Sarfati, “Biblical Chronogenealogies,” *Creation ex Nihilo Technical Journal* 17 (2003): 14–18; Freeman, “Do the Genealogies Contain Gaps?”

alarm about slippery slopes—some slopes, after all, are a bit precarious. But apart from demonstration and quantification, slippery slope arguments tend to degenerate quickly into arguments *ad hysteria*. The hypothesis that modest departure from a 6000-year-old earth position points necessarily to uniformitarianism and theological compromise may be true. But without some sort of evidence (e.g., syllogistic, historical, or statistical demonstration), the hypothesis is nothing more than pure speculation, or worse, slander. In point of fact, there are a great many exceptions to this slippery slope argument.

Hermeneutical Tensions

Proponents of 6000-year-earthism uniformly argue that the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 represent a unique sub-genre of genealogy not observable in the balance of Scripture.⁸ While all are forced to admit that *some* of the biblical genealogies feature (1) demonstrable gaps, (2) a flexible use of the term *begat*, and (3) abridgement for the purpose of symmetry, such features are argued to be absent in the chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11. In these two genealogies (and these genealogies only) the fastidious use of numbers leaves no room for gaps; instead, Moses's attention to these numbers prove that he intended to inform his readers of the exact age of the earth. Note, however, several tensions with this conclusion:

- The author never tells why he included these numbers, ultimately rendering his reasons a matter of speculation. It is possible that dating the earth was one of his purposes, but he never says so.
- If the author's purpose in using these numbers was to establish the age of the earth, then he includes both too much and too little data. On the one hand, the establishment of the age of the earth would require nothing more than the age of each man when he birthed his heir: details about additional children and how long each man lived are completely superfluous to the age of the earth.⁹ On the other hand, Moses omits the one item that could have unequivocally proven the chronogenealogist theory: a grand total.¹⁰

⁸Rosvear and Kulling see two such genealogy sub-genres ("The Genealogies of Genesis" and "Are the Genealogies Complete," respectively). Jordan sees a much more expansive number ("Biblical Chronology Question").

⁹Richard Niessen, having raising the possibility that the Genesis 5 and 11 genealogies exist simply to show the inevitability of death or to trace the Messianic line, exclaims "How shallow!" then ridicules these theories for arbitrarily imposing on readers the "tedium of...dozens of unnecessary numbers." "What are numbers for," he asks, "except to show dates?" ("Biblical Approach to Dating the Earth," 65; cf. also Freeman, "Do the Genealogies Contain Gaps?" 304). In fact, Niessen's argument seems to come back against his own conclusion, as some of the numbers in Genesis 5 and 11 clearly cannot have the function he assumes that they have.

¹⁰Compare, e.g., the tally in Exod 12:40 and, in principle, the tallies in Num 1:46; 26:51 (Whitcomb and Morris, *Genesis Flood*, 474–75).

- As such, the heightened emphasis on numbers in the Genesis 5 and 11 genealogies must have had a purpose that is at a minimum *broader than* and quite possibly *other than* the establishment of the exact age of the earth. Among possible options, one particularly credible proposal stands out, viz., that the numbers were intended to document the progressive deterioration and mortality of the human race: men were reproducing and dying earlier and earlier, the age of the earth notwithstanding.¹¹
- Finally, even if one agrees for sake of argument that Genesis 5 and 11 are instances of the special sub-genre of chronogenealogy, the state of the text is such that the age of the earth remains an open question. While the numbers in the Masoretic Text offer a date for creation of approximately 4000 B.C., the Samaritan Pentateuch points to a date some 401 years earlier, and the Septuagint to a date that fully 1366 years earlier.¹² Note the following chart:

	MT	SP	LXX
Length of Genesis 11 Genealogy ¹³	292 years	942 years	1072 years
Approximate Date of the Flood ¹⁴	2458 B.C.	3108 B.C.	3238 B.C.
Length of Genesis 5 Genealogy	1656 years	1307 years	2242 years
Approximate Date of Creation	4114 B.C.	4415 B.C.	5480 B.C.

To summarize, it is not at all certain that the details of the Genesis 5 and 11 genealogies argue for a 6000-year-old earth, third-millennium B.C. Flood, or other details about the events that took place in the antediluvian world.

Text-Critical Tensions

The most difficult obstacle to a strict chronogenealogical reading of Genesis 5 and 11 is without doubt Luke's inclusion of the name Καϊνάμ/Καϊνάν in his genealogy of Christ (Luke 3:36).¹⁵ This name

¹¹So Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 256. Whitcomb and Morris suggest at least five other “pedagogical purposes,” that the author may have been pursuing when he included these numbers (*Genesis Flood*, 477).

¹²For a modern example of a chronogenealogist who argues for dates roughly approximating the LXX scheme see Benjamin Shaw, “The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 and Their Significance for Chronology” (Ph.D. dissertation, Bob Jones University, 2004). See below for further consideration of the textual problem.

¹³From the birth of Arphaxad to the birth of Abram.

¹⁴I am making this calculation based on a birth year for Abram of 2166 B.C. This date is not accepted by all, but I am using it for the sake of argument to establish a benchmark for comparison. The argument still stands even if one chooses a different date. It is hoped that this will not be a distraction.

¹⁵The spelling of the name is disputed, with about equal support for Καϊνάμ as for

occurs in no known Masoretic manuscript of Genesis 11 and proves to be a particularly thorny issue for all sides of the debate. Three possible explanations for this state of affairs can satisfy the inerrantist: (1) Luke was the victim of textual emendation that saw the addition of a name that he never wrote; (2) Moses was the victim of textual abridgement that saw the deletion of a name that he in fact *did* write; or (3) Moses intentionally penned his genealogy with a gap for his peculiar purposes, and Luke filled that gap for his own purposes. Let's evaluate these options:

First, the possibility that Καϊνάμ/ν is a late addition to Luke's text is countered by overwhelming text-critical support for an original Καϊνάμ/ν. Even proponents of the strict chronogenealogy position are forced to admit that they believe "contrary to uncial evidence [that] Luke did not include [Καϊνάμ/ν] in his original text."¹⁶ Among dozens of extant Lucan manuscripts, just two omit Καϊνάμ/ν, and only one of these (p^{75vid})¹⁷ is a credible witness.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the parade of textual support offered in NA²⁸ for the inclusion of Καϊνάμ/ν in Luke 3:36 is decisive—the text-critical equivalent of a slam-dunk.¹⁹ And while at least one chronogenealogist has offered a respectable theory of how a later scribal addition of Καϊνάμ/ν might have occurred,²⁰ none can offer a credible explanation of how that addition became unanimous. To cite the conclusion to Peter Williams's impressive assessment of the

Καϊνάμ. The question is not significant to the argument of this paper.

¹⁶Freeman, "Do the Genealogies Contain Gaps?" 309.

¹⁷NA²⁸ adds the abbreviation *vid* ("apparently") because just nine letters of verse 36 survive intact in this badly damaged papyrus. Despite this meager evidence, however, it is reasonably certain that there is insufficient room in the reconstructed document for the name Καϊνάμ/ν. I do not question the decision of the editors of NA²⁸ to include this papyrus as support for an omitted Καϊνάμ/ν.

¹⁸Codex Bezae (D) also omits the name Καϊνάμ/ν, but the widely acknowledged unreliable character of this manuscript offers the chronogenealogist model little by way of support. As D. C. Parker opines, "The longer I have studied [Codex Bezae], the more I have become convinced that its many unique readings only very rarely deserve serious consideration if one is trying to establish the best available text" (*Codex Bezae: An Early Christian Manuscript and Its Text* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 1). Parker's widely held opinion of Codex Bezae corrects the curious claim by chronogenealogist Richard Niessen that Bezae is "one of the 5 or 6 most important N.T. Manuscripts" for the discipline of textual criticism ("Biblical Approach to Dating the Earth," 64).

¹⁹Ⲙ, A, B, K, L, N, Γ, Δ, Θ, Ψ, 0102, *f*, *f*³, 33, (565), 700, 892, 1241, 1424, 2542, l2211, 2R, sy^{p,h}, sa^{mss}, bo^{pt}.

²⁰Jonathan Sarfati argues for addition by dittography, theorizing that a later scribe accidentally reduplicated a second Καϊνάμ/ν that appears in the following verse ("What About Cainan?" *TJ* 18 [2004]: 41). See also Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 359. While dated, the most comprehensive defense of the omission of Cainan in Luke 3:36 remains C. Robert Fetter, "A Critical Investigation of the 'Second Cainan' in Luke 3:36" (B.D. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1956).

problem,

These manuscripts [Codex Bezae and p⁷⁵] provide an inadequate basis to confirm the supposition that a scribal error has been introduced into Luke.... Perhaps future textual discoveries will alter the balance of the situation, but at present the evidence discourages us from too confident a claim that error has occurred in the scribal transmission of Luke's Gospel.²¹

It is far more believable that Luke, under the influence of inspiration, used a copy of the LXX when he cited the OT (a fairly common practice for Luke²²) and preserved a true statement from that document.

This brings us, then, to our second possibility, viz., that Moses's original manuscript contained the name קַיִן, but that the name was omitted in later copies. The problem with this theory is that not a single known Masoretic manuscript contains the name קַיִן in the Genesis 11 genealogy. Despite this formidable fact, however, we cannot argue that the name is without attestation. Chiefly, the name appears in almost all extant copies of the LXX, including the venerable Codex Alexandrinus.²³ And while I am convinced that in a majority of text-critical questions the Masoretic Text of the OT proves more reliable than the Septuagint, this surely does not stand as a universal principle.²⁴ So apart from sound reasons to discount the credibility of the LXX reading of Genesis 11, due consideration should be given to this prominent witness.²⁵ Still, the complete absence of the name in any Hebrew text is difficult to overcome.

²¹"Cainan: In or Out?" *Creation ex Nihilo Technical Journal* 14 (2000): 55. For an irenic, thorough, and eminently erudite treatment of the problem see also his "Some Remarks Preliminary to a Biblical Chronology," *Creation ex Nihilo Technical Journal* 12 (1998): 98–106.

²²For more on Luke's dependence on the LXX, see Helmer Ringgren, "Luke's Use of the Old Testament," *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986): 227–35.

²³It is unfortunate that we can make no appeal in our quest to the Dead Sea Scrolls, to which appeals for arbitration between MT and LXX readings may often be made. There is but one word from the Genesis 5 & 11 genealogies that has been preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls. That word, amazingly, is קַיִן (Kainan). However, it is probable that the קַיִן found in the DSS reflects an earlier usage of the name that appears universally in the various renditions of Genesis 5:13–14 (see Eugene Ulrich, ed., *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls: Transcriptions and Textual Variants*, vol. 1, *Genesis–Kings* [Leiden: Brill, 2013], 8).

²⁴Note, for instance, the much publicized problem of 1 Samuel 13:1.

²⁵I specify *sound* reasons deliberately. Sadly, some have turned to inane speculations in their attempt to discredit the LXX of Genesis 11. For instance, Richard Niessen hazarded in 1982 that the LXX translators, under pressure from the Egyptians to expand the Hebrew chronology to accommodate the Egyptian Pharaoh lists, selected the name Καῖνωμ/ν as a secret coded message to the readers that the name was worthless (like Adam's son Káiv), new and contrived (fr. the Greek καίνοϛ), or empty (fr. the Greek κένοϛ) (Niessen, "Biblical Approach to Dating the Earth," 64). Such speculation really has no place in this debate, and I am pleased that this hypothesis, while perpetuated by a more than one chronogenealogist, is not widespread.

In view of the text critical impasse, our third possibility gains merit. It is possible to accept the best-attested readings of both Luke *and* Genesis by suggesting that while Cainan truly *did* exist, Moses chose not to include his name in Genesis 11. He did so without error or malice, but instead operated under the assumption that gaps are perfectly appropriate to genealogies. Luke, on the other hand, armed with the certain knowledge that Cainan was a historical figure, decided for his own undisclosed purposes and under divine inspiration to include the name.²⁶

Intertextual Tensions

The possibility of gaps in the Genesis genealogies is not, as is supposed by some, a conclusion borne strictly out of extrabiblical compulsion to push the date of the flood back as far as possible. Extrabiblical reasons for a slightly older earth do exist (some more credible than others), but these do not comprise the whole of the argument. Note the following:

The Meaning of *Beget*

To *beget* (ἄρᾱ/γεννάω) does not always mean to “father a biological child.” Biological fatherhood is part of the semantic range of these terms, but not the whole. Matthew, for instance, uses the term to denote the relationship of Joram to Uzziah—his great-great-grandson (Matt 1:8). He does not explain why he subsumed three generations in this particular use of γεννάω, but most agree that he made this decision to preserve the symmetry of three groups of fourteen generations. If this is the case for Matthew, perhaps Luke did the same, including Cainan to preserve two symmetrical lists of ten.²⁷ We simply do not know for sure.

The objection, of course, is that the Genesis genealogies have details that ostensibly preclude the possibility of skipped generations: “When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father of Enosh. After he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and

²⁶For a possible reason why Luke might have included Cainan and Moses might have omitted the name, see the next section of this paper.

²⁷Whitcomb and Morris use this argument as possible evidence that Cainan was original in Genesis 5 and 11. Note the following from *Genesis Flood*, 476:

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Adam | 1. Shem |
| 2. Seth | 2. Arpachsad |
| 3. Enosh | 3. Cainan |
| 4. Kenan | 4. Shelah |
| 5. Mahalalel | 5. Eber |
| 6. Jared | 6. Peleg |
| 7. Enoch | 7. Reu |
| 8. Methusaleh | 8. Serug |
| 9. Lamech | 9. Nahor |
| 10. Noah | 10. Terah |
| (Shem, Ham, Japheth) | (Abram, Nahor, Haran) |

daughters. Altogether, Seth lived 912 years, and then he died” (Gen 5:6–8).²⁸ There seems at first blush to be little room for a gap. A closer look, however, yields two very important informing texts to the contrary.

First, the Levitical genealogy of Exodus 6 uses a formula very similar to that of Genesis 5 and 11 in a context that clearly demands a gap of several generations. In detailing the family line of Levi, Moses informs his readers that Levi fathered Kohath and lived a total of 137 years (Exod 6:16), that Kohath fathered Amram and lived a total of 133 years (6:18), and finally that “Amram married his father’s sister Jochebed, who bore him Aaron and Moses. Amram lived 137 years” (6:20). The problem, of course, is that Kohath was one of the original migrants from Canaan (Gen 46:11), precipitating a sojourn in Egypt of some 430 years (Gen 15:13; Exod 12:40–41). In short, there must be generations that were omitted in Exodus 6.²⁹

Second, the genealogical entry for Terah (Gen 11:26) contains anomalies that inform the hermeneutics of Genesis 5 and 11. In this verse we discover that Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran when he was 70 years old. Dismissing the unlikely possibility that Terah and his wife had triplets (a decision that some have questioned³⁰), it would seem that Terah *began* fathering children at age 70. Abram is the first son listed (probably because of his prominence in the biblical storyline), but he *was not the first son born to Terah*. Note the following:

- Genesis 12:4 tells us that Abram was 75 years old when he left his father.
- Acts 7:4 tells us that Abram did not leave until his father was dead.
- Genesis 11:32 tells us that Terah died when he was 205 years old.
- Consequently, Abram was not born until after his father turned 130, at least 60 years after Terah began fathering children (Gen 11:26).

Assuming this pattern, the gist of the genealogies may read something like this: “When Terah had lived 70 years, he began having children. The son critical to the biblical storyline was Abram. After he

²⁸All scriptural quotations are from the *New International Version*, 2011.

²⁹So Whitcomb, “Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11,” 2; see also Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 177; *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 106n. Incidentally, lest one opt for understanding the 400 years of Genesis 15:13 as 4 generations, we observe in Numbers 3:27–28 that Moses and Aaron were numbered among 8600 descendants of Kohath, a man who must either have been incredibly prolific or, more likely, had the much-needed help of additional generations.

³⁰Pete Williams offers an alternative understanding that allows for triplets and no gap at all (“Remarks Preliminary to Biblical Chronology,” 104). I did not find his arguments compelling, but would invite further interaction with it.

began having children, Terah lived 135 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Terah lived 205 years, and then he died.” If this reading can be sustained and a pattern established (i.e., the child of the biblical storyline born on average approximately halfway between the birth of the firstborn son and the death of the father), then we may reasonably calculate that the period between the Flood and the birth of Abram is about 1,668 years, and not the 292 years demanded by the chronogenealogist.³¹ This number cannot, of course, be confirmed, but it does represent a reasonable extrapolation from known biblical data.

We conclude, based on patterns ostensibly established by these two key texts, that there are at least two places for gaps in the so-called “chronogenealogies” of Genesis 5 and 11: (1) a gap of generations, including one that is explicitly revealed (Cainan) but which may not have been the only one; and (2) a gap between the birth of the progenitor’s firstborn and the birth of the child of the biblical storyline.

Anomalies in the Biblical Story Line

The life story of Noah seems oddly truncated and his death out of place if there are no gaps in Genesis 11. When we come to the end of the ninth chapter of Genesis, we find the standard epitaph, “then Noah died.” But if the chronogenealogist is correct, Noah did not die until Abraham was 58 years old.³² Of course, it is possible to suggest that Noah had moved away and was quite forgotten by the time Abraham was on the scene, but the finality of Genesis 9:29 seems quite out of sequence if Noah didn’t die until the end of chapter 11. A natural reading of the early chapters of Genesis strongly suggests that the Noah story ended a long time before the Abraham story began.

Similarly, when Abraham entered into the land of promise, he entered into a land of well-established cities and local governments (Gen 15:19–21),³³ not a land of fellow-pioneers migrating in the aftermath of the recent Babel incident (which by the chronogenealogist’s reckoning might have taken place as recently as 27 years earlier).³⁴ One cannot escape the hermeneutical “feel” that the story speaks of greater antiquity than this.

³¹So Whitcomb, “Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11,” 3.

³²In fact, Shem actually *outlived* Abraham by the chronogenealogists’ reckoning.

³³Shortly after his arrival, we also find Abraham in the mighty empire of Egypt, complete with a Pharaoh (12:15); Philistines entrenched in their traditional territories after displacing the Avvim (Deut 2:23); and cities of the plain with wickedness so advanced that the cup of God’s wrath was already full against them—an ignominious feat that took the rest of Canaan fully 400 years to achieve (Gen 15:13–16). See Whitcomb, “Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11,” 4.

³⁴Assuming (1) that the division of the earth in Peleg’s days (Gen 10:25) references Babel, and (2) that Genesis 11 is a gapless chronology, then Peleg died when Abraham was 48 years old (2119 B.C. by the reckoning in our chart, above).

Extrabiblical Historical Records

Up until this point I have appealed strictly to biblical evidence for modest gaps in Genesis 5 and 11. This has been deliberate, responding to the charges leveled above that such arguments flow uniformly from extrabiblical arguments fraught with the uniformitarian presuppositions of Lyellian geology and Darwinian biology. I would like to add now an undisguised extrabiblical argument—secular historical records—conceding readily the diminished warrant of such an appeal, but stressing also that is unfair to identify this appeal as flowing from uniformitarian principles. Instead, it represents a class of much “harder” evidence.³⁵

The specific “hard” evidence to which I appeal is a well-established Egyptian chronology that extends back many centuries before the flood date demanded by the chronogenealogist. Of course, what must be proven here is that the Egyptian chronology is indeed “well-established,” a premise sharply disputed by strict 6000-year YECs. One reads regularly in the writings of this group that the dates alleged by ancient record-keepers are uniformly skewed by (1) flawed readings of the Egyptian historian Manetho, whose 3rd-century B.C. *Αἰγυπτιακά* identified a series of thirty pre-Ptolmeic Egyptian dynasties extending back to c. 3400 B.C. and (2) too heavy a reliance on Sothic cycles in establishing the beginning of the Egyptian calendar in the fifth millennium B.C. Instead, strict 6000-year YECs propose that we should follow a lesser-known, compressed Egyptian chronology that is held by a minority of historians.³⁶ The issues are far too complex to address fully in a presentation of this scope, but the following summary points prove most salient:

- Prior to the nineteenth century, Manetho’s list took pride of place in dating Pre-Ptolmeic Egyptian history, and a linear/sequential reading of that list prompted many to date the unification of Egypt under Menes (the point at which the dynastic system commenced) to around 3400 B.C. Manetho’s list

³⁵I distinguish here between *soft* evidence that stands on the philosophical foundation of uniformitarianism (e.g., extrapolation from stratification and erosion rates, seriation, radiometric decay, thermoluminescence, etc.), and *hard* evidence that stands upon the manifest ground of direct observation and record-keeping. By making this distinction I am not saying that secular records possess the infallible warrant of special revelation or that they offer unassailable proof of anything (such records regularly contain conjecture, exaggeration, and outright lies); however, they offer us evidence that cannot be rightly and uniformly dismissed as “hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (Col 2:8). Recorded history is in a category fundamentally different from uniformitarian extrapolations from history to more remote conclusions.

³⁶See, e.g., Elizabeth Mitchell, “Doesn’t Egyptian Chronology Prove That the Bible Is Unreliable?” in *The New Answers Book 2*, ed. Ken Ham (Green Forest, AR: Master Books), 246–63; Damien F. Mackey, “Fall of the Sothic Theory: Egyptian Chronology Revisited,” *TJ* 17 (2003): 70–73.

is no longer afforded the prominence it once held. It is now widely accepted that Manetho was painting a rather romantic picture of Egyptian history; further, the discovery of a great many co-regencies in Manetho's list has eroded the earlier understanding that Manetho's list was strictly sequential. Most mainstream Egyptologists today date the rise of Menes to a more recent date between 3150 and 2950 B.C., and place only minimal weight on Manetho's list to come to this conclusion.³⁷

This compression may seem to be something of a vindication of the 6000-year model, but it really is not. There is no evidence forthcoming that the Egyptian chronology will be compressed any further than this; instead, a complex of sources have combined to fix the date for the beginning of the dynastic arrangement at least a thousand years earlier than the 6000-year-earth model can allow.

- The Sothic Cycle theory of Egyptian dating has likewise fallen from favor among modern Egyptologists: many reject the theory entirely; none embrace it in its totality. A bit of explanation is in order. The Egyptian calendar is based on a 365-day model, and makes no provision for the quarter day gained each year (a problem solved with a leap year in the Julian calendar). As such, the Egyptian calendar loses time like a bad watch, and aligns with the solar year once every 1460/1 years, an event allegedly marked by the heliacal rising of the star Sothis (Sirius). Eduard Meyer, arguing from (1) the deduction that the calendar must have been invented at the beginning of one of these cycles, (2) his discovery in Greek literature that one such realignment occurred in A.D. 139, and (3) his further discovery in the papyri of two earlier references to Sothic alignments (in 1320 B.C. and 2780 B.C., respectively), concluded that the calendar must have been invented exactly one cycle earlier—on July 19, 4241 B.C.³⁸ Based on these astronomical benchmarks, he dated the unification of Egypt under Menes to 3315 B.C.³⁹

Many today dismiss Meyer's theory entirely and opt for alternative factors to establish Egyptian chronology.⁴⁰ Those who

³⁷The venerable *Cambridge Ancient History* (1970) offers a date of 3119 B.C. (1.1:173–93); Anthony Spalinger a range of 3050–2950 B.C. (*Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 3 vols., s.v. "Chronology and Periodization," 1:267); and Joachim Friedrich Quack a date of ca. 3050 B.C. ("Egyptian Rulers Until Alexander the Great," in *Chronologies of the Ancient World: Names Dates, and Dynasties in Brill's New Pauly, Supplements*, ed. Walter Eder and Johannes Renger [Leiden: Brill, 2007], 35). In line with these key sources is Fekri A. Hassan's suggestion of 3125 B.C. ("Radiocarbon Chronology of Ancient Egypt," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 39 [July 1980]: 203–7).

³⁸Eduard Meyer, *Ägyptische Chronologie* (Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1904), 45.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 178.

⁴⁰Spalinger acknowledges the possibility of a Sothic cycle and other astronomical

do recognize Meyer's theory as valid limit its value to the cycles beginning in 1320 B.C. and 2780 B.C., and relegate the 4241 B.C. date to the realm of pure conjecture.⁴¹ Further diminishing the value of Meyer's work is the fact that his papyri discoveries involved *nameless* kings, consensus for whose identity can no longer be established. As such, the only real point of agreement among Sothic sympathizers is that the first dynasty began sometime before 2780 B.C. To summarize, the inadequacies of the Sothic theory are now readily acknowledged—it is for all practical purposes irrelevant to the discussion.

- If secular Egyptologists no longer depend on Sothic cycles to establish their chronology, and depend much more cautiously on Manetho than they did previously, what holds the modern consensus together? A cross-cultural network of witnesses far more ancient and well-established than was previously available. Two Egyptian sources are especially load-bearing: (1) the Palermo Stone, a fifth-dynasty basalt stele that covers the period from the beginning of the first dynasty under Menes through the middle of the fifth dynasty and (2) the Turin Canon, a 13th-century B.C. papyrus that details the first to the seventeenth dynasties in extreme detail.⁴² Beyond these, though, we also have the widespread corroboration of the records of contemporary ANE cultures, including (3) the Assyrian king lists (dating to Tiglath-Pileser II, c. 967 B.C.), (4) the Hittite king list (specific from the 17th century B.C. forward, but offering background material that extends as early as the 24th century B.C.),⁴³ (5) the Babylonian king lists (dating to the 19th century B.C. in its more conservative "A" list rendering), and (6) the Sumerian king list (the earliest independently corroborated king of which dates to approximately 2600 B.C., with the 24th-century B.C. Sargon of Akkad its

occurrences in establishing the Egyptian chronology, but concludes, "Nevertheless, it was mainly the Turin Canon, Manetho's works, the king lists, and an important series of dated monuments and texts that helped establish a relatively accurate arrangement of the pharaohs and their regnal years" ("Chronology and Periodization," 1:267; also *ibid.*, "Calendars," 1:225; and esp. Patrick O'Mara, "Censorinus, the Sothic Cycle, and Calendar Year One in Ancient Egypt: The Epistological Problem," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 62 [2003]: 17–26).

⁴¹See, e.g., Shaw, *Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, 10–11.

⁴²Highly specific, the Turin Canon supplies not only years, but also months and days of each reign. In many cases it confirms Manetho's list, but also improves on his list by identifying some of Manetho's kings as regional governors and by excluding others, a fact that alerts us to the possibility that other names on his list are more parochial and overlapping than formerly imagined.

⁴³See the list in Trevor Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), xiv, xv; note also his extended historical discussion that makes up the body of the volume.

most famous representative).⁴⁴ Other Elamite, Sumerian, Akkadian, and Hebrew sources could be cited as well, though much of argument here rests on linguistic similarities of names to those discoverable in other ancient sources.⁴⁵ It should also not go unnoticed that significant advances in radiometric and thermoluminescence dating methods have corroborated the collocated witness of these various Ancient Near Eastern records in establishing a date for the beginning of the dynastic system between 3100 and 2900 B.C.⁴⁶

The significance of this last paragraph cannot be understated. If the academy could offer no proof of Egypt's antiquity other than the exaggerated numbers offered by a third-century Egyptian who may have been less interested in history than in reviving an ancient ancestor cult (Manetho) and the dubious speculations of the Sothic theory, then we might rightly question the reliability of the conclusions of the academy. But this simply is not the case. The network of ANE sources that argues consistently for an earlier flood-date is extensive, complex, cross-disciplinary, and even multi-cultural. The task of explaining it away is overwhelming in its scope. It will never do for the

⁴⁴The Sumerian king list is of special interest in that it lists 10 antediluvian kings and 39 postdiluvian kings, offering some curious parallels to Genesis and possibly (1) offering traces of a common tradition or (2) suggesting the number of postdiluvian generations for which we must account. Key differences between the lists (esp. the longevity of the Sumerian kings, three of whom reigned 72,000 years), however, make such links hazardous at best. For a helpful summary of this issue see Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 and Their Alleged Babylonian Background," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 16 (Autumn 1978): 361–74.

⁴⁵For instance, speculations concerning the kings in Genesis 14 have included an identification of biblical Amraphel as Hammurabi of Babylon, the biblical kingdom of Ellasar as the kingdom of Larsa, and the biblical Chedorlaomer of Elam with Kudur-Lagamar king of Elam. Unfortunately, these identifications seem to have been made with greater optimism than precision (see, e.g., Hamilton, *Genesis Chapters 1–17*, 399–400). For more modest suggestions see, among others, Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 320.

⁴⁶The mere mention of radiometric dating causes many in the YEC to bristle, and with good reason—radiometric dating of antediluvian materials has not been kind to the YEC cause. Radiocarbon dating of organic, postdeluvian materials has not, however, been uniformly discouraging, especially when the additional benefit of dendrochronological calibration is employed (q.v. Michael Hasel, "Recent Developments in Near Eastern Chronology and Radiocarbon Dating," *Origins* 56 [2004]: 7). Calibration of radiometric dates for Egypt, based largely on astronomical data and cross-referenced ANE sources have been trending toward a sharp truncation of ancient dates for Egypt's pre-history, but only to a point. A 1970 symposium tasked with determining specifically whether radiocarbon dating could establish a date of 3100 B.C., 3000 B.C., or 2900 B.C. as the beginning of Egypt's first dynasty, for instance, failed in its goal, but did set very tight parameters on the discipline: the results of radio-carbon dating are not infinitely elastic, and point uniformly to Egyptian activity about a millennium earlier than what is feasible for 6000-year YECs (T. Säve-Söderbergh and I. U. Olsson, "C-14 Dating and Egyptian Chronology," in *Radiocarbon Variation and Absolute Dating* [Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1970], 35–55).

6000-year creationist to claim victory on the strength of a partial discrediting of the claims of Manetho.

- Finally, I cannot stress enough that appeals by some 6000-year YECs to the compressed dating theories of Immanuel Velikovsky, whether directly or as modified by some of his sympathizers (e.g., David Rohl, Donovan Courville, and Roger Henry), really must be discontinued posthaste.⁴⁷ That Velikovsky developed a small following for his compressed Egyptian chronology does not mean that the theory is worthy of our attention. Quite simply, Velikovsky was an imaginative psychiatrist whose theories of colliding planets, close encounters, and cultural amnesia are more the makings of an interesting Star Trek episode than anything resembling careful historiography or science. We simply cannot afford to link the Young Earth movement to these kinds of absurdities.

CONCLUSION

In preparing this article I wrestle with the tension of a great many friends who hold to a 6000-year earth. Indeed, I can honestly say that I have come to understand and respect more fully that position after reading several of its more credible defenses. And while I obviously disagree with them, I have no desire to cut off such friends, ridicule their studied conclusions, or force them out of the young-earth community on account of our disagreement. I would like to appeal for such a stance to be reciprocal within the young-earth creationist movement.

If I can close with a provocative analogy, I would like to make this suggestion: 6000-year onlyism has become for the YEC movement today what the textual debate was to the fundamentalist movement of the 1990s—an unsustainably exclusive and sometimes shrill stance that threatens the already-fragile credibility of its movement. If anyone wishes to defend a 6000-year-old earth, I will respectfully demur, all the while regarding him as a brother-in-arms. If, however, the YEC “guild” tells me that I *must* believe in a 6000-year-old earth under threat of exclusion as a modernist, a uniformitarianist, or a Bible denier, then I will be obliged to advocate for a young earth quite apart from that guild.

⁴⁷See Immanuel Velikovsky, *Worlds in Collision* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1950); idem, *Ages in Chaos* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1952); idem, *Earth in Upheaval* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955). Velikovsky’s theories have been preserved, with substantial modification, in later treatments such as Donovan Courville, *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications* (Loma Linda, CA: Challenge Books, 1971); Peter James, *Centuries of Darkness* (London: Jonathan Cape 1991); and David M. Rohl, *Pharaohs and Kings: A Biblical Quest* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1995); idem, *From Eden to Exile: The 5000-Year History of the People of the Bible* (London: Random House, 2002).