

The Genealogies in the Bible: Are they Complete?

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1. Problems in the Genealogies from Jacob's Sons to David

Some have said that the Israelites could not have been in Egypt for 430 years, because the number of generations given in some of the more prominent genealogies seems to be far too few for that time period. The worst case is the genealogy from Levi to Moses (shown in the last column of the table below), where a span of three generations covers 393 years, giving 131 years per generation. This genealogy is far too short. Granted, we know that in the earliest periods of the Bible the generations were longer, and that they gradually became shorter, as seen in Genesis 5 and Genesis 11. However, this genealogy of Levi was after the time of Abraham, and people were amazed that Abraham had a son at the age of 100, so it is clearly too short.

Another genealogy shown in the table is only a little less problematic is the 10 generations from Judah to David in Ruth 4:18-20 (also included in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1), with an average of 87.7 years per generation. (In Luke 3:33 Ram is called Arni, and an additional generation is added with Admin¹. Even so, this only brings each generation down to 79.7 years. These variations are marked in red in the table below, and the most complete passage is also marked in red.)

However, the 11 generations from Joseph to Joshua in 1 Chr. 7:22-27 suggest that the 430 year period is quite reasonable, since the average number of years per generation is only 38.6.

Similarly, the 21 generations from Levi to Heman (grandson of the prophet Samuel and a contemporary of David) give an average number of years per generation of only 41.9 years.

However, Asaph and Ethan, who worked with Heman, have much shorter genealogies, with many more years per generation.

¹ This is according to the *English Standard Version* and Aland, Barbara et al. *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition*. The *New International Version* has "Amminadab, the son of Ram", and says in a footnote, "Some manuscripts *Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni*; other manuscripts vary widely."

And finally, the high priestly line² from Aaron (brother of Moses) to Zadok (contemporary) of David³ in Ezra 7:1-5 is a continuation of the Levi to Moses/Aaron list, but has far fewer years per generation. The same list appears in 1 Chr. 6:3-8, but with one name missing, Azariah.

(Elishama and Nahshon were probably contemporaries of Moses, since they are listed as heads of their respective tribes in Numbers 1. Giving them both a birth year of 1526 would give an intermediate average per generation of 43.2 years for Elishama and 78.6 years for Nahshon (or 65.3 including Admin), so even over a shorter time period the average length of a generation is about the same. I have not found any indication of which individual in the other columns was contemporary with Moses.)

The genealogies in the table are listed in order of years per generation, from least to greatest.

	Joseph to Joshua	Levi to Heman (Samuel's grandson)	Aaron to Zadok (High priests)	Levi to Asaph	Levi to Ethan (the Merarites)	Judah to David	Levi to Moses
Passage(s)	1 Chr. 7:22-27	1 Chr. 6:33-38	Ezra 7:2-5 1 Chr. 6:3-8	1 Chr. 6:39-43	1 Chr. 6:44-47	Luke 3:31-33 Ruth 4:18-20 Matthew 1:2-6	1 Chr. 6:1-3
Generations	11	21	10 (or 11)	14	13	10 (or 11)	3
Years elapsed	424	879	489	879	879	877	393
Years per generation	38.6	41.9	48.9 (or 44.5)	62.8	67.6	87.7 (or 79.7)	131
Sons of Jacob	Joseph born 1915	Levi born 1919		Levi born 1919	Levi born 1919	Judah born 1918	Levi born 1919
Grandsons of Jacob	Ephraim	Kohath		Gershon	Merari	Perez	Kohath
	Beriah	Izhar				Hezron	
	Rephah	Korah				Ram (or Arni)	
	Resheph	Ebiasaph		Jahath	Mushi	Admin	Amram
	Telah	Assir		Shimei	Mahli	Amminadab	
	Tahan	Tahath		Zimmah	Shemer		
	Ladan	Zephaniah		Ethan	Bani		
	Ammihud	Azariah		Adaiah	Amzi		
Contemporaries of Moses	Elishama (43.2/g)	Joel	Aaron 1529	Zerah	Amzi	Nahshon (78.6/g)(65.3/g)	Moses born 1526
	Nun	Elkanah	Eleazar	Ethni	Hilkiah		
	Joshua born 1491	Amasai	Phinehas	Malkijah	Hashabiah		
		Mahath	Abishua	Baaseiah	Malluch	Salmon	
		Elkanah	Bukki	Michael	Abdi	Boaz	
		Zuph	Uzzi	Shimea	Kishi	Obed	
		Toah	Zerahiah	Berekiah		Jesse	
		Elieel	<i>Meraioth</i>				
		Jeroham	<i>Azariah</i>				
		Elkanah	<i>Amariah</i>				
		Samuel	<i>Ahitub</i>				
		Joel					
Contemporaries of David		Heman born 1040?	Zadok born 1040?	Asaph born 1040?	Ethan born 1040?	David born 1041	

² This shows the line of descent of the high priests, though not all of these actually held the office. Specifically, the five generations from Zerahiah to Ahitub (in italics) did not hold the office, but instead the line of Eli held office instead: Eli, Ahitub, Ahijah, Ahimelech, and Abiathar. However, Eli's line was totally wiped out, and Zadok from the line of Zerahiah took over. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_High_Priests_of_Israel#From_the_Exodus_to_the_Babylonian_Exile for a handy comparative chart.

³ 2 Samuel 8:17.

2. Missing Generations in Old Testament Genealogies

So what is going on here? Simply that in most or all of these genealogies **some of the generations have been left out**, most notably in the genealogies on the right side of the table. This was a common practice, and was well understood by the original readers. However, the two genealogies on the left are probably fairly complete, though even here some generations may have been left out.

This has big implications for the ancestry of David and the dating of the events in the book of Ruth. At first glance it appears from the genealogies of David that Boaz is David's great-grandfather, and this would make us look for the famine mentioned in Ruth sometime around 1100. This famine was probably not caused by the weather, since it did not affect Moab, but instead was probably the result of one of the oppressions mentioned in Judges, in which the oppressors confiscated food supplies. Around 1100 the Ammonite oppression in Judges 10:6-9 would be the most likely. However, when we realize that generations must be missing from this genealogy, and that Boaz may have been only two generations away from the Exodus from Egypt, we realize that he may have lived much earlier, making us look for an earlier time of oppression, possibly that of the Moabites themselves, which might explain why Elimelech and Naomi moved to Moab in the first place. This would also explain why, if Samuel wrote the book of Ruth as tradition suggests, some of the customs were already unknown to his readers (see Ruth 4:7).

3. From David to the Babylonian Captivity

Above we saw that in the first section of the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1, specifically the part from Judah to David, many generations must have been left out. It turns out that this is true for the other two sections as well.

It says in Matthew 1:17 that there were 14 generations from David to Jeconiah, but actually we know that this is not true, but that there were actually 18: the full list is found in 2 Chr. 3:10-16. These kings and their dates are shown in my [Bible chronology chart](#) (1040-586 B.C.), and are thoroughly documented in the books of Kings and Chronicles, so we know that this list is complete, one of the few genealogies for which we can be sure of that. Thus there are four generations left out in the Matthew list, the red names in the list on the right in the first column. Matthew was not trying to be deceptive, and in any case he could easily be disproven by anyone who knew the Old Testament.

Instead it is simply that Jesus' legal genealogy in Matthew 1 was designed to have three sections of 14 to aid in memorizing it, rather than including each and every generation.

So, with the complete genealogy, we see that the average number of years per generation is less than 24, about what we would expect for vigorous kings who married fairly young, but leaving out the four names it would be 30.4. This suggests that even the more complete genealogies listed above are incomplete.

I have also listed the continuation of the high priests' genealogy for the same period on the right for comparison. Here the average number of years per generation is much lower than in the first part of the list, so this list could

Passage(s)	David to Jeconiah (Kings of Judah)	Zadok to Jehozadak (High priests)
	2 Chr. 3:10-16 Matthew 1:17	1 Chr. 6:8-15 Ezra 7:1-2
Generations	18 (14)	11
Years elapsed	426	407
Years per generation	23.7 (30.4)	37
	David born 1041	Zadok born 1040?
	Solomon Rehoboam Abijah Asa Jehoshaphat Jehoram (Joram) Ahaziah Joash Amaziah Uzziah (Azariah) Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah Manasseh Amon Josiah	Ahimaaz Azariah Johanan Azariah Amariah Ahitub Zadok Shallum Hilkiah Azariah
	Jehoiakim born 633	Seraiah born 633?
	Jeconiah born 615 (Jehoiachin)	Jehozadak

theoretically be complete, but in fact it is clear that it is not. We can tell this by trying to synchronize the priests with the kings. However, the resulting chart is rather messy, so I have included it as an [appendix](#) at the bottom of this article.

4. From the Babylonian Captivity to Jesus

"Legal" Genealogy of Jesus
Jeconiah born 615
Shealtiel
Zerubbabel
Abiud
Eliakim
Azor
Zadok
Akim
Eliud
Eleazar
Matthan
Jacob
<u>Joseph born 30?</u>
Total years: 585
Per generation: 48.8

On the left we have the third section of the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. In these 12 generations the average number of years per generation is nearly 50 years, which, though not quite impossible, is extremely improbable.

In Luke 3:23-38 we have another genealogy, and this one is probably actually Mary's, not Joseph's. (Women were not normally included in genealogies.) Thus it represents Jesus' actual human bloodline, since he was Mary's physical son, but had no human father.

This genealogy is done in reverse, and has 42 generations from David to Jesus, rather than the 27 in the Matthew genealogy. And unlike the Matthew genealogy, this genealogy is probably complete, since the average number of years per generation is less than 25.

That being the case, does that mean all the rest of the Luke genealogy is complete? No, it doesn't: as seen above, the section from Judah to David is still missing many generations.

"Human" Genealogy of Jesus		
Jesus born (Mary)	→	5?
Heli	Semein	Eliezer
Matthat	Josech	Jorim
Levi	Joda	Matthat
Melki	Joanan	Levi
Jannai	Rhesa	Simeon
Joseph	Zerubbabel	Judah
Mattathias	Shealtiel	Joseph
Amos	Neri	Jonam
Nahum	Melki	Eliakim
Esli	Addi	Melea
Naggai	Cosam	Menna
Maath	Elmadam	Mattatha
Mattathias	Er	Nathan
	Joshua	<u>David born 1041</u>
		Total years: 1036
		Per generation: 24.7

5. Before Abraham

What about the genealogies before Abraham, from Adam to Abraham? Are they complete? The genealogies in Genesis 5 and in Genesis 10:11-32 are different from other genealogies in that they give age information, how long each individual lived, and how old each one was at the birth of his son. Because of this extra information, many have claimed that these genealogies must be complete, and in fact have used them to calculate the exact year that Adam was created.

However, as we have seen how genealogies are structured throughout the Bible, clearly this is not necessarily true, and there are in fact many good arguments that it is in fact not true. These arguments are ably set forth by other authors, including John Millam at reasons.org/articles/the-genesis-genealogies and Hugh Henry and Daniel Dyke at reasons.org/articles/from-noah-to-abraham-to-moses-proof-of-genealogical-gaps-in-mosaic-literature-part-1, among many others. These articles also expand greatly on some of the genealogy questions I have discussed above.

Millam discusses the fact that in the pre-Abrahamic genealogy in Luke 3:34-38, there is an additional name not mentioned in the genealogies in Genesis 11, that of Cainan⁴. Based on this fact he states:

Comparing the genealogy of Genesis 11 with Jesus' genealogy in Luke 3, we find that Luke contains the name Cainan between Shelah and Arphaxad (as noted earlier in this paper). **The inerrancy of scripture, therefore, demands that there is at least one name missing in Genesis 11**, and so at least one of the two Genesis genealogies is telescoped. Despite this direct Biblical evidence, some still hold to the belief that Genesis genealogies are complete, and hence that the inclusion of the name Cainan in Luke 3:36 is incorrect. One scenario would be that Luke based his genealogies on late copies of the Septuagint containing Cainan and so mistakenly added it to his genealogy. This scenario obviously contradicts Biblical inerrancy and so must be rejected. (Emphasis mine.)

Thus, biblical inerrancy requires us to conclude that the Genesis 11 genealogy is incomplete!⁵ Both of the articles provide good arguments that not just one but many generations are missing. Thus, it is not possible to determine the chronology of the Bible prior to Terah, father of Abraham, which is why my [Bible chronology chart](#) starts with Terah!

⁴ This is not Canaan, the son (or descendant) of Ham, but an additional name in the genealogy of Abraham not included in the Masoretic text of the Old Testament.

⁵ In his revised article (reasons.org/files/articles/The-Genesis-Genealogies.pdf) he backs down somewhat from this conclusion, but I think his initial conclusion is valid. Reasons to Believe seem to agree with me, since the initial article is the one they still have posted.

6. Appendix: High Priests Synchronized with Kings from David to the Babylonian Captivity and Beyond

It is possible to synchronize much of the list of high priests in 1 Chr. 6:8-14, Ezra 7:1-2, and Nehemiah 12:10 with the kings of Judah and down to the end of the Old Testament, but the resulting table is rather messy. One problem is that between Jehoshaphat and Josiah the three generations listed in 1 Chr. 6:8-15, Ahitub, Zadok, and Shallum, are never mentioned as priests, whereas four others are mentioned in the books of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. This suggests that another family line was in office during this period, that of Jehoiada, for which we have no genealogy, but that it died out before the time of Josiah, and was replaced with a different line, that of Ahitub, whose family had not actually been in office. Also, it is clear that the generations during this period are incomplete, since we have only four generations spanning 260 years, though the rest of list may be fairly complete.

The generations, years elapsed, and years per generation only apply to the list through Jeconiah and Jehozadak.

The Ezra list for this section is extremely short, leaving out 7 names, those in red. It also leaves out Jehozadak and calls Ezra the son of Seraiah, which is unlikely since Ezra lived about 100 years later! However, he was clearly his descendant and was related to the high priests Joiakim and Eliashib who were his contemporaries.

As in the previous genealogies, the most complete passage for each genealogy is marked in red, and names not included in all of the genealogies (or in any of them in the case of column 2) are also marked in red.

The article en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_High_Priests_of_Israel#From_the_Exodus_to_the_Babylonian_Exile provides additional information and an interesting chart, which I found helpful in building mine. However, it also includes Jewish traditions which are not backed up by Scripture, so take it with a grain of salt!

Azariah seems to have been a favorite priestly name: there are four in the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 6, and there seem to have been two more in Jehoiada's line!

	David to Jeconiah (Kings of Judah) to Nehemiah the governor	High priests mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, but not in the genealogies	Zadok to Jehozadak to Jaddua (High priests)
Passage(s)	2 Chr. 3:10-16 Matthew 1:17		1 Chr. 6:8-14, Ezra 7:1-2, Neh. 12:10
Generations	18 (14)		11
Years elapsed	426		407
Years per generation	23.7 (30.4)		37
(Contemporaries)	David born 1041		Zadok born 1040? Ahimaaz (2 Sam. 15-18)
(Contemporaries)	Solomon 991		Azariah (1 Ki. 4:2)
	Rehoboam Abijah Asa		Johanan* Azariah*
(Contemporaries)	Jehoshaphat 908		Amariah (2 Chr. 19:11)
	Jehoram (Joram)		
(Contemporaries)	Ahaziah	Jehoiada (2 Ki. 11-12)	
	Joash Amaziah		
(Contemporaries)	Uzziah (Azariah) 807	Azariah (2 Chr. 26:16-21)	Ahitub* Zadok* Shallum*
	Jotham		
(Contemporaries)	Ahaz 755	Uriah (2 Ki. 16)	
(Contemporaries)	Hezekiah 740	Azariah (2 Chr. 31:10)	
	Manasseh Amon		
(Contemporaries)	Josiah 648		Hilkiah (2 Ki. 22-23) Azariah*
(Contemporaries)	Jehoiakim born 633		Seraiah born 633? (2 Ki. 25:18)
(Contemporaries)	Jeconiah born (Jehoiachin) 615		Jehozadak (1 Chr. 6:15)
(Contemporaries)	Zerubbabel 538-515+ governor (grandson of Jehoiachin, Ezra 1-6, Hag., Zech.)	Josephus 515-490 in Office† 520-515+	Jeshua or Joshua (Ezra 1-6, Hag., Zech.)
(Contemporaries)	Ezra the priest 458-432+ (Ezra 7-10) Nehemiah governor 444-432+ (Neh. 2:1-13:6)	490-470 470-433 444-425?	Joiakim (Neh. 12:11, 26) Eliashib (Neh. 3:1,20,21, 13:4,7,28)
		433-410 410-371	Joiada* Jonathan or Johanan (Neh. 12:22-23)
(Contemporaries?)	Alexander the Great 329	371-320	Jaddua

* High priests not mentioned in the Bible outside of these genealogies, and some of these (see text) may not actually have held the high-priestly office.

† These are times when this person was clearly high priest, though his term may have begun earlier or continued later. Josephus' figures are clearly incorrect in several cases.

The additional names from Nehemiah 12:10 are marked in blue. It seems likely that generations are missing here, since two generations from Jeshua to Eliashib in over a hundred years seems too few. If Josephus is correct in making Jaddua a contemporary of Alexander the Great, then the latter part of the list may be complete.