



justthesimpletruth

The Importance of Difficult Passages

Genesis 5:

by Jeremy Cagle

I wish I could count how many times I tried to read the Bible in a year. I would get somewhere between Numbers and Deuteronomy and have to stop. Two years ago, I was a member of a Bible Study that agreed to read through the entire Bible in one year. The plan was to begin January 1 and go to the end of December. By January 13, the entire Bible Study was behind and by January 26, we had stopped altogether.

Why do we do that? Why do begin to read the Bible, only to stop three to four books into it? There are three main reasons why many of us plan to read the Scriptures in their entirety, but fail.

The first reason is a lack of interest. Many people begin to read the Bible because someone has told them to, whether that someone be a Sunday School teacher, a friend, or a pastor. They never finished because they were just not that interested to begin with. Some people who fall into this category start the endeavor because they think it would be a noble thing to do; others, because it soothes their conscience. Whatever the reason, in truth, people in this group are about as interested in the Bible as they would be in *Silas Marner*.¹

The second reason is a lack of discipline. Some believe that Christianity is not only motivated, but is actually governed, by feelings and emotions. The individuals who fall within this category read God's Word when they feel like it . . . and don't read it when they don't feel like it.

These first two reasons for not reading the Bible could apply to either Christians or unbelievers. A lost person could pick up the Bible up and put it down due to a loss of interest. Some saved people could do the same.² Likewise, a non-Christian could begin reading the Bible and stop due to a lack of discipline in the same manner as an undisciplined believer.

But the third reason is mostly for Christians: a lack of understanding. Most unsaved people will tell you that

they do not read the Bible because they do not understand it. Sometimes that is true, but for the most part, lost people do not read the Bible because it is offensive to them. They come to passages such as John 14:6, where Jesus says, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through Me," or Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," and find them to be narrow-minded, pompous, or intolerant in their pronouncements.

Christians, however, often stop reading through their Bibles because they come to, say, Genesis 5:14, which declares, "So all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years, and he died." And they ask themselves, "Who is Kenan?" Most believers stop reading their Bibles simply because they are confused: they do not understand the Word of God.

Yet, 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." Paul, the author of that letter, did not tell Timothy, the recipient of the letter, that *some* Scripture is useful for training in righteousness, he said *all* of it is. If all Scripture is God-breathed and useful for training, then it is important for us to know all of it.

The purpose of the present work is to explain and elaborate on a passage (Gen 5) that some of you may not understand. According to 2 Timothy 3:16, however, Genesis 5 is placed in the Bible to teach us something and we must find out what it is.

www.justthesimpletruth.com

issueONE – the Bible

II. The Age of the Bible

The first thing Genesis 5 teaches us is the age of the Bible. Genesis 5:1 begins, “This is the book of the generations of Adam.” The word for “book” here in 5:1 is pivotal to a correct understanding of this verse. The English transliteration³ of the Hebrew is *sefer*. It literally means, “inscription, writing, document, or scroll.”⁴

The author of Genesis 5 was Moses.⁵ He wrote the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.⁶ In other words, he wrote all of the books that are most difficult (with the possible exception of Revelation) to understand.

Moses was born around 1525 B.C.⁷ He left Egypt when he was forty⁸ and returned 40 years later⁹ to tell the Pharaoh of Egypt to let the Israelites go. The time span between when Moses returned to Egypt and when the Israelites were actually released from Egyptian rule would have been around 80 years. So some time after 1445 B.C., Moses sat down and wrote a historical/legal account of the Israelites.

Deuteronomy 31:24 – 27 tells us why he did so:

It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete, that Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, “Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you. For I know your rebellion and your stubbornness; behold, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the Lord; how much more, then, after my death?”

Now, notice something intriguing here in Genesis 5:1. As Moses is writing about the history of mankind (which is what the book of Genesis is), from the creation of Adam (Gen 1:26 – 30), to the first sin (Gen 3), to the first murder (Gen 4), he comes to chapter 5 and says, ‘here is the *sefer* of the generations of Adam.’ In other words, here is the “writing, inscription, document, scroll”¹⁰ of the generations of Adam!

Why is this significant? The “document” appearing in Genesis 5:1 shows us two things. First, it demonstrates that Moses had written resources from which to draw upon in writing the book of Genesis. He was not just

using oral testimony; he had actual, written material to use. Second, it shows that someone wrote a Biblical account before 1445 B.C. In other words, someone gave a written account of Adam’s descendants before Moses began writing!

Who was this person? We don’t know. What we do know, however, is that we have a written document in our hands that is 3,500 years old, probably much older. It is very likely that Moses was referring to documents that were not written in his lifetime, perhaps documents that were 4,000 years old or more.

Think about that: 4,000 years old. A 4,000 year old book!

This statement is so amazing that it is either ridiculous or life changing.

III. The Age of the Earth

By extension, the age of the Bible also allows us to determine the age of the earth. If you read Genesis 1 – 9, you will notice that Genesis 5 was not written in the same way as the rest of the chapters.

Chapter 1 talks about the creation of the earth. Chapter 2 discusses the creation of man. Chapter 3 describes Adam and Eve’s sin. Chapter 4 is the story of Cain and Abel. Chapters 6-8 tell us of The Flood. Chapter 9 relates God’s Covenant with Noah.

Chapter 5, however, is a genealogy chart. Adam gave birth to Seth, Seth gave birth to Enosh, Enosh gave birth to Kenan, Kenan gave birth to Mahalalel and on and on and on.

Why is Genesis 5 in this part of the Bible? This document of Adam’s descendants is the only historical record we have of what took place between Creation and The Flood. Creation and The Flood would have been unforgettable events to the descendants of Moses, or to anyone, for that matter. These events would not have been easily forgotten, but other events would have been. How did Seth make a living? Picking berries or making spears? How did Enosh find a wife? How did the people in Kenan’s day worship? What sins did they struggle with?

All the mundane things between Creation and The Flood would have been forgotten, but thanks to God’s providence, someone took the time to write down a list of Adam’s firstborn descendants.

AGE OF THE EARTH¹¹

<i>Patriarch¹²</i>	<i>Year of Birth</i>	<i>Age at Birth of Son¹³</i>	<i>Year of Death</i>
Adam	1	130	930
Seth	130	105	1042
Enosh	235	90	1140
Kenan	325	70	1235
Mahalalel	395	65	1290
Jared	460	162	1422
Enoch	622	65	987 ¹⁴
Methuselah	687	187	1656 ¹⁵
Lamech	874	182	1651
Noah	1056	500	2006

The heading of the chart above is, “Age of the Earth.” But how do these numbers tell us how old the earth is?

Please follow me closely here. The chart below should help you understand the numbers described above. Whenever a number is referred to above, compare it to Genesis 5 and the reference chart below.

**1656 years after creation:
THE FLOOD**

500 – 1,000 years:

Period between THE FLOOD and EXODUS

1,500 – 2,000 years:

Period between EXODUS and JESUS¹⁶

2,000 years:

Period between JESUS and 2005

Conclusion:

Approximate age of the Earth: 5,650 – 6,650 years

When Adam was born the earth was six days old.¹⁷ So, when Adam died at the age of 930, the earth was 930 years old.¹⁸ Seth was born in the year 130, and Genesis 5:8 says Seth lived for 912 years. Therefore, Seth would have died

1,042 years after the creation of the earth. Seth fathered Enosh when he was 105 (Gen 5:6), causing Enosh to be born 235 years after Creation. According to verse 11 of chapter 5, Enosh lived 905 years and died 1,140 years after Creation.

If we add all this up, Noah was born 1,056 years after Creation. Genesis 7:6 says that The Flood came when Noah was 600 years old or 1,656 years after Creation. Thus, there were 1,656 years between Creation and The Flood.

The time that passed between The Flood and Exodus¹⁹ would have been between 500 and 1,000 years. The time between Exodus and the birth of Jesus would have been between 1,500 and 2,000 years.²⁰ The time between Jesus and the present day is approximately 2,000 years.²¹ The conclusion to all this is that the earth is approximately 5,650 to 6,650 years old.

If you are like I was when I first read this, you may have serious doubts regarding the validity of such a number. What about all the evidences from carbon dating? What about all the changes that must have taken place between Adam’s world and ours? All that would have taken millions of years, right?

To extend this argument further, what about all of the years it would have taken to populate the earth between Creation and The Flood? What about all of the years it would have taken to populate the earth between The Flood (Gen 9) and the Tower of Babel (Gen 11)? Surely that would require tens of thousands, if not millions, of years, right? To claim that the earth is only, at most, 6,650 years old is ridiculous!

Acknowledging all of these objections, let me ask you this: is it more likely for everything that exists (love, guilt, the universe, our world, your family) to come from nothing, or is it more likely that carbon or other scientific dating techniques might be wrong and the earth could really be 6,650 years old?²² Is it more likely that your great-great-grandfather is a monkey,²³ or is it more likely that the earth could be 6,650 years old?

If you believe that the Bible is the Word of God, you believe that God created the earth, mankind did not

evolve from lower forms of life, and the earth is at most 6,650 years old. There are no gaps in the lists of Genesis 5 and Genesis 11.

IV. The Formation of the Bible

Genesis 5 also teaches us about the Formation of the Bible. According to Genesis 5:5, “So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.” Adam lived for over 900 years. If you look at the chart above, Lamech – Noah’s father (Gen 5:25 – 31) – was born 874 years after Creation. Adam lived to see his son and *seven* successive generations of grandchildren being born!

That is interesting, but what does it have to do with the formation of the Bible? The key point here is that it is very likely that Adam had contact with these men. As the saying goes, ‘Grandchildren are your reward for not killing your children.’ Adam would have naturally wanted to see his children and grandchildren. His children and grandchildren would have naturally wanted to hear about Creation and the events that followed. Adam would have given them this information and they would have passed it along. And if you consider the fact that Methusaleh lived until the year of the Flood,²⁴ it is very likely that Adam shared this information with Methusaleh, who shared it with Noah.

When Noah entered the ark, he would have been carrying second hand information about the creation of Adam and Eve, about Adam and Eve’s sin, and about the death of Abel. This is very important information.

PLEASE FOLLOW CLOSELY HERE: Genesis 9:29 tells us that Noah lived to be 950 years old. According to Genesis 7:6, he was 600 years old when he entered the ark. Therefore, Noah lived 350 years after the Flood. If we look at the genealogical chart in Genesis 11, Noah’s descendants did not live to be as old as he did, but they lived well over 100 years (Gen 11:19, 21, 23, 25), some over 400 years (Gen 11:11, 13, 15, 17). Considering the overlap of these men’s lives, by the time Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob come along in Genesis 12, we see that it is very likely that Abraham could have received third or fourth hand information about Creation.²⁵ From Adam to Methusaleh, we have firsthand information, from Methusaleh to Noah, we have secondhand information,

and from Noah to Abraham, Terah, or Nahor, we have third- or fourth-hand information.

Abraham’s grandson, Jacob moved to Egypt and one generation later, Moses – the author of Genesis – was born. The conclusion of all this is that when Moses sat down to write Genesis, he was not writing information that was millions of years old. He was not writing about material that had been orally transmitted by dozens or hundreds of generations. In writing Genesis, Moses wrote down information that had passed through five or six hands.

Why is this important? What does it matter if Moses wrote down fifth-hand information or fifty-fifth hand information?

Did you every play the game ‘telephone?’ All the game’s participants sit in a circle and someone begins the game by whispering a message to the person next to him and the message continues one-by-one until the person on the end is reached. The message usually starts out as something like, ‘The lion is very strong’ and ends up, ‘Ralph is a beautiful man.’

Oral transmission can change information, especially over a long period of time. Two things, however, work in the Bible’s favor. First of all, Moses was going on some previously written information when writing Genesis. Secondly, he was going on information passed down by a few men, not by a lot of men. The ‘telephone’ game was not played by many people when the Genesis account was relayed, it was only a few.

V. The Stability of the Bible

Genesis 5 teaches us about the stability of the Bible. The following Biblical passage shows us the consistency of Scripture. The first four verses in 1 Chronicles are as follows, “Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methusaleh, Lamech, Noah.” If you compare that list to Genesis 5, you will see that it is the same list chronologically. All the names are in the exact same order in both lists.

The book of 1 and 2 Chronicles were written after the Hebrews were taken off into exile in Babylon. During

the writing of these books, the Jews were wondering if they were still God's chosen people. After all, they were no longer in the Promised Land, could they still be the people of the promise?²⁶ The author of Chronicles sought to answer this question by saying, in a sense, 'Of course you are God's chosen people, look at your history! Your great-great grandfather was Abraham and his great-great grandfather was Adam.' And, in putting together this impressive list of names, what does the Chronicler begin? With the Genesis 5 list.

Chronicles was written some time after 450 B. C.,²⁷ over 1,000 years after the writing of Genesis.²⁸ And, after such an extensive period of time, the author of chronicles still through this list of names was worth repeating.

Luke 3:23 lists the genealogy of Jesus. It presents the ancestors of Christ in a reverse order compared to the lists in Genesis 5 and 1 Chronicles 1. In verse 34, we see that he was "the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham." And, later in verses 36-38, we see that he was "the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methusaleh, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God." This is the exact same list, in reverse order and with some slight spelling variations,²⁹ from Genesis 5.

Luke was written around 60 -62 A.D.,³⁰ 1400 to 1500 years after the writing of Genesis, and yet he used the list from Genesis 5 when giving the genealogy of Jesus.

Jude 14 states, "It was also about these men that Enoch, *in the seventh generation from Adam*, prophesied, saying, 'Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones.'³¹ Apparently, Enoch was a prophet – the first prophet in the Bible. Whatever his profession, though, Jude says he was the seventh generation from Adam. If

you count up seven generations, starting with Adam, you come to the name 'Enoch.'

Jude was written about the same time as Luke³² and, in describing Enoch, he turns to what? Again, the list in Genesis 5.

Every author in the Bible who ever wrote anything with respect to Adam's genealogy, accepted Genesis 5 as being historically accurate. This demonstrates the Bible's stability and consistency. If the Bible contradicted itself on such a major point as the descendants of Adam, the first man, we would have a real problem. But the Bible does not!

I had a friend in High School and later in college, named Elaine.³³ When she found out that I was studying philosophy in college, she asked me why I would study such an arbitrary subject. It told her that I enjoyed studying it because it made me question my beliefs in Jesus' Deity, the Bible's historical accuracy, and other subjects of importance. Philosophy forced me to give an account for what I believed.

During one of our conversations about this, Elaine made a statement that I found unsettling. She said, 'I wouldn't want to question what I believe because I would be afraid of what I might find.' Elaine had little faith in her faith.

Some of you may be like that as well. You come across a passage like Genesis 5 and decide that you want to avoid it. You might be afraid that you might find the Bible to be in error. I exhort you and challenge you, when you come across a passage like Genesis 5, don't run and hide but dig in and stay. Study difficult passages like these to learn what the Bible does and does not say.

Have faith in your faith.

Endnotes

¹ I know this is a bad analogy for those who are actually interested in *Silas Marner*. However, this author read it in 10th grade English, and found it to be exceedingly dull.

² Let the reader understand: genuine salvation will spark a genuine desire to know and study the Bible. Although a saved person may not be interested in reading Scripture initially, that desire should grow along with their sanctification. If it does not, it is wise to doubt their salvation. It is the same with discipline. New Christians may not have the discipline, on the outset, to consistently read their Bibles. But if this skill is not developed, their salvation is in question. After all, if Christians are not feeding their souls with the Word of God, what are they feeding them?

- ³ A “transliteration,” is a pronunciation of one language written in the dialect of another. In other words, since Hebrew letters are unintelligible to English readers because they are not written in the English alphabet, it is necessary to ‘sound them out’ in an alphabet that English readers would understand. Hence, *sefer*.
- ⁴ *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. by William L. Holladay (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988) 259.
- ⁵ *NIV Study Bible*, ed. by Arthur Lewis (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 2.
- ⁶ Also known as the “Torah” or the “Pentateuch.”
- ⁷ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1997), 91.
- ⁸ Acts 7:23.
- ⁹ Ex 7:7.
- ¹⁰ Holladay, 259.
- ¹¹ Patriarch chart taken from: Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1976) 154.
- ¹² These names only represent the names of Adam’s *firstborn male descendants*. The list is not comprehensive (i.e. these men were not the only children of Adam and his firstborn male descendants). The list includes their name, son, age when son was born, and age at death.
- ¹³ The numbers used in Genesis 5 are not figurative numbers. Figurative numbers in the Bible are always general numbers, not specific ones like 930 (Gen 5:5) or 905 (Gen 5:11) or 365 (Gen 5:23). For instance, see the example of Moses discussed above. He was 40 years old when he left Egypt; he was 40 years old when he returned. Moses was on the mountain 40 days and 40 nights receiving the 10 commandments (Ex 34:28). We see this same usage in other parts of the Bible. The Israelites were in the wilderness for 40 years (Ex 16:35) and Jesus fasted 40 days and 40 nights (Matt 4:2).
- The number 40, when used in Scripture, is symbolic of a large number. It is figurative because of its repetition. Because it is used consistently to describe diverse events, it is to be taken as a figurative number. However, if the number 41 were to be used, it would be taken literally because there is not repetition of the number 41 in Scripture. For another example of the repetition of a figurative number, look for the number 7 in Revelation.
- ¹⁴ Enosh did not die but ‘was no more.’ (see Gen 5:24)
- ¹⁵ Died in the year of the Flood.
- ¹⁶ MacArthur, 3.
- ¹⁷ Adam was created on the sixth day of creation, Gen 1:24 – 31.
- ¹⁸ Gen 5:5 says Adam was 930 years old when he died. Because of the timeline of Adam’s birth, his age and the age of the earth would have been identical. The ages of other men described in this chart can be derived from Scripture using Adam as the benchmark.
- ¹⁹ This number can be calculated by adding up the genealogy charts in Gen 11 just as we have done here with the charts in Gen 5.

- ²⁰ This number can be calculated by adding up the estimated ages of the Old Testament books compared with the ages of the New Testament books.
- ²¹ This is common knowledge. Since the birth of Jesus stopped B.C. dating convention and started the A.D. dating convention, the year 2006 would be 2,006 years after His birth.
- ²² I would quote from some scientific scholars to prove that some claim that the universe came from nothing, but it is not necessary. Anyone who has attended a public school system has heard this theory taught as fact, in some form or another. The most common form of the Big Bang Theory states that the universe started with hydrogen, but where that hydrogen came from is never discussed. John Ankerberg and John Weldon make a profound statement about this problem of secular scholarship, “Apart from theism, there could only be nothing, which is why the question is so profound for materialists.” *Darwin’s Leap of Faith* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1973), 248.
- ²³ Although this is a universally known foundation of evolution, for the benefit of the reader, see Charles Darwin, *Origin of the Species* (New York: Random House Value Publishing, Inc., 1979) for a study of Charles Darwin’s proposal of this event. Just a brief note on this work: Darwin never explicitly claimed that men evolved from apes. He did, however, say that all life evolved from lower forms of life. His followers tracked such a thought to its logical conclusion: men evolved from apes.
- ²⁴ Methusaleh died 1,656 years after Creation, the same year that The Flood (see chart above).
- ²⁵ Since we do not know who spoke with whom, it is necessary to state third- or fourth-hand here.
- ²⁶ Raymond Dillard sums up this sentiment well, “The burning issue (of 1 Chronicles) was the question of continuity with the past: Is God still interested in us (parenthesis mine)?” *NIV Study Bible*, ed. by Michael A. Vander Klipp (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995) 572.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 571.
- ²⁸ See Part II: The Age of the Bible.
- ²⁹ The variations in spelling are due to the languages of the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, while the New Testament was written in Greek. Thus, the same word used in Genesis and 1 Chronicles would have a different transliteration than in Luke, since Genesis and 1 Chronicles were written in Hebrew and Luke was written in Greek.
- ³⁰ MacArthur, 1504.
- ³¹ Italics mine.
- ³² MacArthur, 1983.
- ³³ The name has been changed to protect the individual mentioned.