

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, **as can be seen** in the table below.

The genealogies in the table are listed in order by years per generation, from least to greatest. Most of the columns can be split into two parts, since we know Moses' contemporaries, and I have made intermediate calculations in these cases.

(The dates are taken from my [Bible chronology chart](#). We do not know the actual birth years of Elishama, Korah, Nahshon, or Dathan and Abiram, but all of these were contemporaries of Moses,¹ so I have tentatively given them the same birth year as Moses, followed by a question mark, just to allow us to make the necessary calculations.)

The worst cases are four of the genealogies from Jacob's sons to Moses (or his contemporaries), in columns 1, 4, 7, and 8. For example, in column 7 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.² Column 4 is similar, except that Aaron was three years older than Moses. The genealogies in columns 1 and 8 are also similar, though we only have approximate birth years for Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

¹ Elishama and Nahshon are listed as heads of their respective tribes in Numbers 1. Dathan and Abiram are brothers who died without descendants during Moses' lifetime, and Korah died with them but had descendants (Numbers 16:1, 26:11). I have not found any indication of which individual in the two remaining columns was contemporary with Moses.)

² We can actually determine that the missing generations almost certainly occurred after Kohath and before Amram. The following verses make clear that Amram was the actual father of Aaron, Moses, and Miriam, and that Jochebed was their mother:

Exodus 6:20: "Amram took as his wife Jochebed his father's sister, and she bore him Aaron and Moses, the years of the life of Amram being 137 years."

Numbers 26:59: "The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed the daughter [NIV a descendant] of Levi, who was born to Levi [NIV the Levites] in Egypt. And she bore to Amram Aaron and Moses and Miriam their sister."

It does not tell us who Amram's father and Jochebed's brother was, but it couldn't have been literally Levi, since we know that at least one generation intervened, that of Kohath, so the NIV's translation must be correct.

And it seems fairly certain that Kohath really was the son of Levi and not a later descendant. Thus I conclude that the missing generations occurred after Kohath and before Amram.

Another genealogy shown in the table that is only a little less problematic is column 6, 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 Admin³. 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 9 generations from Joseph to Elishama 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 43.2.⁴

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Passage(s)	Levi to Heman (Samuel's grandson) 1 Chr. 6:33-38 (Num. 16:1)	Joseph to Joshua 1 Chr. 7:22-27	Levi to Asaph (the Gershonites) 1 Chr. 6:39-43	Levi to Aaron to Zadok (High priests) Ezra 7:2-5 1 Chr. 6:1-8, 50-53	Levi to Ethan (the Merarites) 1 Chr. 6:44-47	Judah to David Luke 3:31-33 Ruth 4:18-20 Matthew 1:2-6	Levi to Moses 1 Chr. 6:1-3	Reuben to Dathan & Abiram Num. 26:5-9
Jacob's sons to David	Generations: 21 Years elapsed: 879 Years/generation: 41.9	11 424 38.6	14 879 62.8	13 879 67.6	13 879 67.6	10 (or 11) 877 87.7 (or 79.7)		
Jacob's sons to Moses	Generations: 3 Years elapsed: 393 Years/generation: 131	9 389 43.2		3 390 130		5 (or 6) 392 78.4 (or 65.3)	3 393 131	3 395 131.7
Moses to David	Generations: 18 Years elapsed: 486 Years/generation: 27	2 (partial) 31? 15.5?		10 (or 11) 489 48.9 (or 44.5)		5 485 97		
Sons of Jacob	Levi born: 1919	Joseph born: 1915	Levi born: 1919	Levi born: 1919	Levi born: 1919	Judah born: 1918	Levi born: 1919	Reuben born: 1921
Grandsons of Jacob	Kohath	Ephraim	Gershon	Kohath	Merari	Perez	Kohath	Pallu
Contemporaries of Moses	Izhar	Beriah Rephah Resheph Telah Tahan Ladan Ammihud		Amram		Hezron Ram (or Arni) Admin Amminadab		Eliab
	Korah born: 1526?	Elishama born: 1526?	Jahath Shimei Zimmah	Aaron: 1529	Mushi Mahli Shemer	Nahshon born: 1526?	Moses born: 1526	Dathan & Abiram born: 1526?
	Ebiasaph Assir Tahath Zephaniah Azariah Joel Elkanah Amasai Mahath Elkanah Zuph Toah Eliel Jeroham Elkanah Samuel Joel	Nun Joshua born: 1495??	Ethan Adaiah Zerah Ethni Malkijah Baaseiah Michael Shimea Berekiah	Eleazar Phinehas Abishua Bukki Uzzi Zerahiah Meraioth Azariah Amariah Ahitub	Bani Amzi Hiilkiah Amaziah Hashabiah Malluch Abdi Kishi	Salmon Boaz Obed Jesse		
Contemporaries of David	Heman born: 1040?		Asaph born: 1040?	Zadok born: 1040?	Ethan born: 1040?	David born: 1041		

³ 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."

⁴ We get an even lower figure for years per generation if we include the next 2 generations up to Joshua, only 38.6. However, Joshua's birth date is unknown, and the one I have provided is perhaps higher than some estimate, so we probably shouldn't consider this lower years per generation figure to have much validity.

Looking at the larger timespan from Jacob's sons to David and his contemporaries, 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.

Finally, if we only look at the second timespan, from contemporaries of Moses to David and his contemporaries, we find that in column 1 Heman's genealogy only has 27 years per generation, much lower than anything else in the table.

The high priestly line⁵ from Aaron (brother of Moses) to Zadok contemporary of David⁶ in Ezra 7:1-5 is a continuation of the Levi to Moses/Aaron list, but has far fewer years per generation, **only 48.9 (or 44.5), but this is much higher than Heman's genealogy for the same period.** (The same list appears in 1 Chr. 6:3-8, but with one name missing, Azariah.)

The column 6 genealogy from Nahshon to David is no better for this timespan than for the earlier one, actually much worse, with 97 years per generation.

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.

⁵ This shows the line of descent of the high priests, though not all of these actually held the office. [See the Appendix below for more details.](#)

⁶ 2 Samuel 8:17.

	David to Jeconiah (Kings of Judah)	Zadok to Jehozadak (High priests)
Passage(s)	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/generation	23.7 (30.4)	37
	David born 1041	Zadok born 1040?
	Solomon	
	Rehoboam	
	Abijah	
	Asa	Ahimaaz
	Jehoshaphat	Azariah
	Jehoram (Joram)	Johanan
	Ahaziah	Azariah
	Joash	Amariah
	Amaziah	Ahitub
	Uzziah (Azariah)	Zadok
	Jotham	Shallum
	Ahaz	Hilkiah
	Hezekiah	Azariah
	Manasseh	
	Amon	
	Josiah	
	Jehoiakim born 633	Seraiah born 633?
	Jeconiah born 615 (Jehoiachin)	Jehozadak

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.

In the table on the left I have also listed in the right column the continuation of the high priests' genealogy for the same period 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 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

In the table below we have on the left 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, shown in the table below on the right, 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.

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

"Human" Genealogy of Jesus		
Jesus born	→	5?
(Mary)	Semein	Eliezer
Heli	Josech	Jorim
Matthat	Joda	Matthat
Levi	Joanan	Levi
Melki	Rhesa	Simeon
Jannai	Zerubbabel	Judah
Joseph	Shealtiel	Joseph
Mattathias	Neri	Jonam
Amos	Melki	Eliakim
Nahum	Addi	Melea
Esli	Cosam	Menna
Naggai	Elmadam	Mattatha
Maath	Er	Nathan
Mattathias	Joshua	David born 1041
		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-gene-sis-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 Cainan⁷. 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!⁸ 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!

6. The Genesis 10 Table of Nations and Y-Chromosomal DNA

In Genesis 10 a different kind of genealogy is provided, often called the Table of Nations. For a discussion of this, and how it may have a possible correlation with Y-Chromosomal DNA, see my article [The Genesis 10 Table of Nations and Y-Chromosomal DNA](#).

7. Appendix: High Priestly Lines Synchronized with Old-Testament Rulers

The table on the next page originally only included the high priests starting with Zadok, contemporary of king David. However, it now includes (since January 2017) all of the known high priests in the Old Testament.

The first section lists high priests from Aaron to Zadok, contemporary of David, and tries to synchronize these with the names of judges and other events in Joshua and Judges, though this is not easy given the difficulties of the chronology of Judges. Evidently prior to Eli the family line of high priests changed from the line of Eleazar son of Aaron to the line of Ithamar son of Aaron, and then with Zadok at the beginning of Solomon's reign it changed back to Eleazar's line.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

	Rulers and events		High Priests													
Passage(s)	Judges and events in the book of Judges and the reign of Saul			Main line of High Priests descended from Eleazar son of Aaron												
				Ezra 7:2-5, 1 Chr. 6:3-8												
				(See the first chart above for calculations from Aaron to Zadok.)												
(Contemporaries)	Joshua			Eleazar (Deut. 10:6, Josh. 24:33) Phinehas (Josh. 24:33, Jdg. 20:28)												
(Contemporaries)	Samuel		This line of high priests temporarily replaced the Eleazar line, and are descended from Ithamar son of Aaron (1 Chr. 24:3-6)	Abishua* Bukki* Uzzi* Zeremiah* Meraioth* Azariah* Amariah* Ahitub*												
(Contemporaries)	Saul		<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Eli</td> <td></td> <td>1-4</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>(Phinehas)</td> <td>Eli</td> <td>1-4</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ahitub*</td> <td>Phinehas</td> <td>14:3</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Eli		1-4		(Phinehas)	Eli	1-4		Ahitub*	Phinehas	14:3		
Eli		1-4														
(Phinehas)	Eli	1-4														
Ahitub*	Phinehas	14:3														
(Contemporaries)	David		<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Ahijah</td> <td>Ahitub</td> <td>14:3,18</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ahimelech</td> <td>Ahitub</td> <td>21-22</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Abiathar</td> <td>Ahimelech</td> <td>22:20-22</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Ahijah	Ahitub	14:3,18		Ahimelech	Ahitub	21-22		Abiathar	Ahimelech	22:20-22		
Ahijah	Ahitub	14:3,18														
Ahimelech	Ahitub	21-22														
Abiathar	Ahimelech	22:20-22														
(Contemporaries)	David		(1 Kings 2:26-27,35)													
Passage(s)	David to Jeconiah (Kings of the united kingdom and of Judah) to Nehemiah the governor			Zadok to Jehozadak to Jaddua (High priests)												
	2 Chr. 3:10-16			1 Chr. 6:8-14,												
	Matthew 1:17			Ezra 7:1-2, Neh. 12:10												
	Generations	18 (14)		11												
Years elapsed	426		407													
Years/generation	23.7 (30.4)		37													
(Contemporaries)	David born	1041	(Ahimelech) Abiathar (1 Chr. 18:16, 24:3,6)	Zadok born 1040? Ahimaaz (2 Sam. 15-18)												
(Contemporaries)	Solomon	991		Azariah (1 Ki. 4:2)												
	Rehoboam Abijah Asa			Johanah* Azariah (1 Chr. 6:10)												
(Contemporaries)	Jehoshaphat	908		Amariah (2 Chr. 19:11)												
	Jehoram (Joram)		This is possibly a line of high priests that temporarily replaced the main line, though it has no genealogy or descent information. It is unknown if they are descendants of Ithamar or Eleazar.													
(Contemporaries)	Ahaziah (Queen Athaliah)		Jehoiada (2 Ki. 11-12) (Son Zechariah, 2 Chr. 24:20-25)	Ahitub* Zadok* Shallum*												
(Contemporaries)	Joash (Jehoash)															
(Contemporaries)	Amaziah															
(Contemporaries)	Uzziah (Azariah)	807	Azariah (2 Chr. 26:16-21)													
(Contemporaries)	Jotham															
(Contemporaries)	Ahaz	755	Uriah (2 Ki. 16, Is. 8:2)													
(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 (Jehoiachin) born	615		Jehozadak (1 Chr. 6:15)												
(Contemporaries)	Zerubbabel governor (grandson of Jehoiachin, Ezra 1-6, Hag., Zech.)	538-515+	Josephus 515-490 in Office† 520-515+	Jeshua or Joshua (Ezra 1-6, Hag., Zech.)												
(Contemporaries)	Ezra the priest (Ezra 7-10)	458-432+	490-470	Joiakim (Neh. 12:12, 26)												
(Contemporaries)	Nehemiah governor (Neh. 2:1-13:6)	444-432+	470-433 444-425?	Eliashib (Neh. 3:1,20,21, 13:4,7,28)												
			433-410 410-371	Joiada* (Neh. 13:28) Jonathan or Johanah (Neh. 12:22-23)												
(Contemporaries?)	Alexander the Great	329	371-320	Jaddua*												

Names in *italics* in the columns of high priests probably did not actually hold the high-priestly office, even though they appear in the genealogies. See the text for more information.

* High priests not mentioned in the Bible outside of these genealogies, or at least not explicitly called priests or high priests. Some of these may not have actually held the high-priestly office, particularly those in italics.

† 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 second section of the table shows how the lists of high priests in 1 Chr. 6:8-14, Ezra 7:1-2, and Nehemiah 12:10 **synchronize** 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 Jehoniah 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**.

Names not included in any genealogies are marked in blue. These constitute two replacement lines of priests.

The article en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_High_Priests_of_Israel 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, **plus one in the genealogy from Aaron to Zadok!**

The additional names from **Nehemiah 12:10** are marked in **green**. 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.