

Did Methuselah Really Live to be 969?

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Introduction

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Did people really live to be hundreds of years old as recorded in Scripture?

[AP] Genesis 5 records that prior to the Flood, people typically lived for hundreds of years, with the average age of the antediluvian patriarchs (excluding Enoch, who was taken to his reward without dying) being 912 years. The Bible specifically states that Adam, for example, lived 930 years (Genesis 5:5), Methuselah lived 969 years (Genesis 5:27), etc. However, some have suggested that while the Bible **says** these old worthies lived to be vast ages, that is not what it **means**. In other words, while the biblical statements themselves on these matters are clear, their meaning is not.

This is the case, we are told, because it is a matter of record that men today (obviously) do not live to be centuries old. Thus, some have suggested that the biblical record is unacceptable and therefore needs to be “fixed” or “explained” to bring it more into line with modern scientific facts on these matters, and to make its message palatable to people of our day and age [similarly to what some have done in regards to the age of the earth and the days of creation – BW].

In the June 1978 *Does God Exist?* journal that he edits, John Clayton addressed the patriarchs’ ages in an article on “The Question of Methuselah.” He suggested:

One of the most frequently asked questions that we receive in our lecture series is “How did men live so long during early Biblical times?” The Bible indicates ages of 969, 950, etc., years for early men. **From a scientific standpoint we cannot verify this figure.** By studying the bones of the oldest men we get ages of ten to thirty-five years usually, and only rarely an age as high as fifty (1978a, 5[6]:11, emp. added).

In the September 1978 issue of his journal, Clayton commented:

One final difficulty that this relates to is the attempts made by some to nail down specific historic dates to Biblical events of great antiquity. **The ages of men in the past cannot be answered with great accuracy** (1978b, 5[9]:9, emp. added).

Mr. Clayton [also] wrote:

It is a fact that there is **no scientific evidence** that people lived to be hundreds of years old. It may just be that we haven’t found the right bones, but most bones of ancient men turn out to be twenty or thirty years of age and none have [sic] been found, to my knowledge, older than eighty years old. For this reason, I have tried to point out that **there are many possible ways in which the extreme age of Methuselah might be explained...** (p. 2, emp. added).

The absence of scientific evidence substantiating the Bible’s claims for the ages of the patriarchs is why Clayton cannot bring himself to accept those ages. Think for just a moment how radical this position really is. What “scientific evidence” do we possess that “proves” the virgin birth of Jesus? Since science cannot prove that such an event ever occurred, should an alternate explanation be sought? This line of reasoning could be expanded almost endlessly. Since science cannot “prove” Christ’s bodily resurrection, the parting of the Red Sea, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and hundreds of other such occurrences, then must these events—which remain both scientifically unverified and unverifiable—simply be dismissed in the same way these two authors suggest that the patriarchs’ ages be dismissed?

And surely the question must be asked: Why do the great ages of the patriarchs need to be “explained” in the first place? Why not simply accept the biblical record as it is written? In his June 1978 article on Methuselah, John Clayton provided the answer to that question as he discussed several possible ways to “explain” the patriarchs’ ages. He wrote:

The first possibility is that God miraculously changed man’s life expectancy. There is no discussion of such a miracle in the Bible, but many miracles occurred during the creation which are not recorded in Genesis I. This may well be the answer, **but since no skeptic would accept it** we’ll consider some other possibilities (1978a, 5[9]:11, emp. added).

This is incredible. First we are told that because there is “no scientific evidence,” the great ages of the patriarchs therefore must be “explained.” Second, we are told that since “no skeptic would accept” a particular view on these matters, “other possibilities” need to be explored. What a sad commentary on how Mr. Clayton, and others like him, view God’s inspired Word. It brings to mind the comment of biblical scholar Edward J. Young in his book, *Studies in Genesis One*:

What strikes one immediately upon reading such a statement is the low estimate of the Bible which it entails. Whenever “science” and the Bible are in conflict, it is always the Bible that, in one manner or another, must give way. We are not told that “science” should correct its answers in the light of Scripture. Always it is the other way around (1964, p. 54).

The question, then, no longer becomes, “Does the Word of God affirm it?” but instead “Can science confirm it?”

Some have suggested that men’s ages were not determined in ancient times as they are today. For example, John Clayton wrote:

The guess that appeals to this writer is that the methods of measuring age are not the same today as they were when men lived so long... We also know that many cultures use the moon as a measure of age (such as many American Indian tribes). If Methuselah were measured on such a system his age would be 80 years, plus the time till he became a father. This doesn’t change anything as he would still be phenomenally old—especially for the day in which he lived, but it would give a modern comprehension of how such an age was calculated (1978a, 5[6]:12, parenthetical item in orig.). [End AP]

In other words, it is suggested that Bible readers change “years” to “months.” Accordingly, Adam did not really live to be 930 years old, but rather a more reasonable 77 years old (Genesis 5:5). And, likewise, Seth lived to be 76 years old instead of 912 (5:8). And Enosh (5:11), Kenan (5:14), Mahalalel (5:17), Jared (5:20) would thus have also lived an average of 76 years.

However, not only does the Bible not support in any way such a notion, but such a method also presents some other serious problems. If “years” is changed to “months” in calculating the ages of the patriarchs, then some interesting things happen. Genesis 5:3 says that Adam became the father of Seth when he was 130 years old; divide that by 12 and the result is that Adam fathered a child at age 11. Furthermore, if adjusted accordingly, Seth later fathered Enosh when he was 9 (5:6), Enosh fathered Kenan at age 7, and Enoch fathered Methuselah at the age of only 5!

So which is easier to believe? That men lived to be 900+ years old? Or that these same men were fathering children while they themselves were as young as 5 years old?

Genesis 8:13, in regards to the end of the flood, says, “Now it came about in the six hundred and first **year**, in the first **month**, on the first of the month...” Moses, the inspired writer, apparently understood the difference between a month and year.

Abraham fathered Isaac at age 99 and Sarah gave birth at age 90 (17:17). Surely no one is here advocating that “years” really means “months.” Furthermore, Genesis 25:7-8 shows that, by the time of Abraham, men did not live as long as they once did. Abraham died at the “ripe old age” of 175. In Genesis 47:9, Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty: few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning.”

Why was there a change in longevity after the flood?

A simple study of the ages of the patriarchs shows a definite change in longevity around the time of the flood...

- Genesis 5... **ADAM: 930; SETH: 912; ENOSH: 905; KENAN: 910; MAHALALEL: 895; JARED: 962; METHUSELAH: 969; LAMECH: 777**
- **Genesis 9:29... NOAH: 950 (600 years before flood; 350 after)**
- **Genesis 11:10-32... SHEM: 600; ARPAKSHAD: 438; SHELAH: 433; EBER: 464; PELEG: 239; REU: 239; SERUG: 230; NAHOR: 148; TERAH: 205**
- **Genesis 25:7-8... ABRAHAM: 175**
- **Genesis 35:28-29... ISAAC: 180**
- Genesis 50:26... **JOSEPH: 110**

It is obvious that those who lived before the time of the flood lived significantly longer than did those who lived after the flood. A gradual lessening of longevity exists throughout the generations after Noah. In fact, by the time we get to the end of the book of Genesis, the average life-span of man is quite similar to that of today.

Several theories have been suggested to explain this change in longevity...

1. Canopy of Water

Genesis 1:6-8

It is contended that the firmament or expanse is synonymous with our sky or space. Notice that the text says that this expanse “separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse.” The theory is that there was then an enormous canopy of water surrounding the earth, a canopy that remained there until the time of the flood.

Also recall that Genesis 2:5-6 says, “God had not sent rain upon the earth,” but rather “a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground.” And, according to Genesis 9:13, it appears that God had not yet set His rainbow in the cloud.

Some have suggested that this canopy was a thin shell composed of water – either as a liquid, or vapor, or solid (ice particles or an ice shell). Regardless, this canopy would have remained in place until “the floodgates of the sky were opened, and the rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights” (Genesis 7:11-12). This then would be the defining time between the longevity of man during the days of the canopy and the shorter ages of man thereafter.

What benefits would be enjoyed by such a canopy of water?

- Promote a greenhouse effect throughout the whole world (evidence of such; vegetation at poles)
- Cause uniform and mild temperatures and humidity, somewhat like a warm tropical environment
- Result in superior weather patterns; no violent windstorms, etc. (like a warm spring day)
- Primarily, it would filter out harmful radiation and ultraviolet and cosmic rays (which are known to hasten the aging process)
- Earth’s magnetic field would be far stronger
- Increased atmospheric pressure (proven to purge the body of toxins and accelerate healing)
- Enhanced oxygen in the atmosphere

It is thus contended that such benefits would help to prevent a variety of damaging effects now common and greatly enhance longevity. Indeed it appears that the earth would have been a much kinder and healthier place to live than what we know now.

Then, after the canopy collapsed during the flood, all these benefits came to an end. The climate was no longer as it once was, and the harmful radiation began to strike, lowering the longevity of man from an average of 900 years down to 70 years (over the course of several generations). In other words, we see the attrition of the second law of thermodynamics, that everything began wearing down.

By the way, we've all heard of the radiocarbon or radiometric dating of rocks. This is how scientists come up with millions and billions of years in their theory of evolution. But, such a method of dating assumes that the present-day rate of decay has always remained constant throughout the history of the earth.

It is assumed, for example, that the intensity of cosmic rays, which will significantly alter this rate of decay, has always remained constant. However, if indeed there was a time when the environment of the earth was drastically different than it is now, then, of course, the results of radiometric dating would be greatly skewed.

Again, a canopy surrounding the earth would have acted as a filter, protecting the earth from cosmic rays. Then, with the collapse of the canopy, it is contended that the earth would have been bombarded with cosmic rays, upsetting all radioactive "clocks," moving them ahead many, many millions of years.

Then later on, with the formation of the ozone layer, this bombardment by cosmic rays would have been somewhat stabilized. The point is, radiometric dating can only be reliable in determining the age of rocks if geological conditions have been uniform over the entire course of the earth's history. Yet this is a tremendous assumption for those who believe the earth to be billions of years old. And if indeed there was such a canopy, then apparently these methods are completely unreliable.

2. General Environmental Changes

Some who deny there was any canopy of water surrounding the earth still concede that there were other dramatic changes in the environment as a result of the global flood, changes that would indeed result in a change in the longevity of man.

For instance, the earth itself apparently underwent some dramatic changes during the course of the flood. Not only did water come upon the earth in the form of rain ("floodgates of the sky were opened"), but, according to Genesis 7:11, God also caused "all the fountains of the great deep [to] burst open." This probably refers to either oceanic or subterranean sources of water or both. Some have surmised that there may have been tremendous releases of water, possibly through large fissures in the ground or in the sea floor. The waters that had been held back likely burst forth with catastrophic consequences, causing great changes in the earth's form and texture.

There are many volcanic rocks interspersed between the fossil layers in the rock record -- layers that were obviously deposited during Noah's flood. So it is quite plausible that these fountains of the great deep involved a series of volcanic eruptions with prodigious amounts of water bursting up through the ground. It is interesting that up to 70 percent or more of what comes out of volcanoes today is water, often in the form of steam.

Furthermore, the flood waters that washed over the land diluted the concentration of many of the minerals in the soil and then, as the land was farmed over and over, year after year, there was a further reduction in essential minerals. The advent of recurring rain would continue to wash minerals downstream and finally into the oceans. With the depletion of a once richly mineralized soil came mineral deficiencies in man's diet which have lowered our bodies' ability to repair and regenerate.

Many scientists now acknowledge that the greatest disaster of the 20th century is the ongoing, worldwide loss of our top soil and its life-supporting minerals. Prehistoric, ancient, fertile soil may have had as many as 85 minerals.

The conclusion is obvious: Because our soils are depleted of minerals, the foods we eat -- the grains, fruits, and vegetables -- are also depleted of minerals, therefore we are depleted of minerals. That depletion has caused our bodies to fail a great deal sooner than our potential.

Another interesting feature of the early earth atmosphere was enhanced oxygen and a denser atmosphere. Robert Berner of Yale and Gary Landis of the U.S. Geological Survey analyzed air bubbles that are believed to have been trapped in amber some 80 million years ago. "The researchers clamped the amber into a vacuum chamber of a quadrupole mass spectrometer, a device that identifies the chemical composition of a substance. As the machine slowly crushed the sample, the microscopic bubbles were released, exhaling up to 100 billion molecules. These breaths disclosed some surprising evidence: the ancient air contained 50 percent more oxygen than the air today." Landis believes that the reduction in oxygen could have led to the dinosaur's demise. (*Discover*, February, 1988, p. 12.)

"One implication is that the atmospheric pressure of the Earth would have been much greater during the Cretaceous era, when the bubbles formed in the resin. A dense atmosphere could also explain how the ungainly pterosaur, with its stubby body and wing span of up to 11 meters, could have stayed airborne, he said." (Anderson, Ian, "Dinosaurs Breathed Air Rich in Oxygen," *New Scientist*, vol. 116, 1987, p. 25.) A Yale study published in the March 3, 2000 issue of *Science* independently confirms the high levels of oxygen present in the earth's distant past.

3. Longevity Genes

Several different factors play a part in how long people live. However, it now appears that underlying all these are factors somehow written into our genetic code, which determine what our 'upper limit' is. This is not really surprising; most of us know of families in which nearly everyone lives to a ripe old age – and the opposite, of course.

Some 30 years ago, a middle-aged lawyer in France struck a deal with a lady client in her 90s. He gained ownership of her apartment, in return for paying her a handsome monthly stipend. She could live in it rent-free all her life. It seemed an obvious win-win; because of her advanced age, he would surely end up with a very cheap purchase, and she would live out her meager allotment of remaining years with a high income. To the lawyer's great misfortune, his client, Jeanne Calment, was destined to become the longest living person in modern history. She died in 1997 (with all faculties intact) at the age of 122 years, 164 days. Her lawyer died of old age long before she did. He (and his estate) ended up paying her the price of her apartment many times over.

Two French researchers have recently traced Calment's genealogy back five generations on both sides. Each of her ancestors had lived a remarkable 10.5 years longer, on average, than the mean age at death of people in the same region. They concluded, then, that these superior longevity genes were passed down to her and resulted in a genetic make-up that surpassed that of any other modern person.

Allow me to explain a bit about how why we get old and die (according to what I've read)...

- Built into man's genetic code (programmed into the DNA) is the ability to replace and repair cells.
- Our organs (liver, kidneys, etc.) are made up of lots of individual cells.
- These cells can divide, repair, and renew themselves, but not forever.
- If they could, if our worn-out cells could always and indefinitely be replaced by newly-manufactured ones, then none of our 'parts' would wear out, which means that we would never wear out and die.
- We might be killed by a falling tree, or die of some infection, but we would never die of old age.
- However, our individual organs *do* wear out, because built into our genetic code is a limit to how often our cells will multiply and replace themselves.
- Ordinary human cells will only divide some 80–90 times, then no more.
- This number is apparently determined by something that appears on the tips of each of our chromosomes, a structure called a telomere.
- It's something like a counting device, with a number of beads on the end. Every time the cell divides, it is as if a bead is snipped off, shortening the telomere.

- Once all of the beads have gone, cell division can no longer take place.
- This then is what leads to the ultimate failure of one or more organs.

It is contended, then, that Adam and Eve and the generations that followed had a genetic make-up that resulted in a great longevity of life. Perhaps their DNA was such that they were programmed with telomeres that allowed for cell division and replacement that lasted for maybe ten times longer than what commonly occurs today.

If so, what happened? Why did the generations after Noah seem to gradually lose the genetic make-up of extreme longevity? Most likely, according to this theory, these longevity genes were gradually eliminated (or lessened severely) due to the severe population ‘bottleneck’ – down to just eight people: Noah, his three sons and their wives. Thus it is entirely feasible that some forms of the genes present in Noah were not passed on. Perhaps subsequent population bottlenecks (at Babel) contributed further to this genetic elimination.

4. Dietary Changes

In Genesis 1:30, God gave this instruction: “To every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food.” It is suggested that, after the flood, the availability and variety of plants available for food would have been drastically reduced. This, in Genesis 9:3, God gave this instruction: “Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant.”

Some have contended, then, that this change in diet contributed (perhaps greatly) to the declining longevity of man. Some believe strongly that those today whose diets closest resemble that of the pre-flood patriarchs will have much better health and succumb to fewer diseases.

Some have even contended that God changed man’s diet so as to intentionally decrease his longevity. Perhaps it was seen that, the longer man lived, the more evil he became (see Genesis 6:5-7). Thus, after the Flood, God immediately decided to change the diet of man – knowing that a move away from the original diet would in time cause a decline in the genetic perfection of man and result in an increasingly lowered potential longevity.

One writer surmised: “Because biblical scholars, like most people, have become desensitized to killing and eating animals, they have interpreted the above passage of scripture [Genesis 9:3] as God's blessing on man-turned-carnivore. But of course it is not divine approval: it is only an acknowledgment of the low estate to which the human race had fallen. Man's development had reached such a nadir [low point] that he would no longer observe the natural law of his being. He would no longer restrict his diet to the things that had been provided as his only legitimate source of food: “[To] everything that has the breath of life in it, I give every green plant for food.” (Gen 1:30.) After the Flood, men no longer even tried to obey this command.

“[Ultimately,] the biological heritage that men and women were passing on to their children reflected the damage that had been done by centuries of eating the meat which has a toxic effect on the human body. From teeth to arteries to intestines, human physiology confirms that man was not created to be carnivorous; that his insistence on eating flesh puts an enormous strain on the entire body.”