

Letters



On Gaps in Genealogies

William H. Gilbert wrote an interesting letter in the June 2004 issue, referring to the article in the December 2003 issue by Carol Hill. I wish to comment on that letter.

Hill's main point was that numbers in the Old Testament were not always meant to be taken at face value. Gilbert challenges some of Hill's conclusions, and cites evidence to show that, in particular, the gaps that Hill claims to find in the genealogies of the Old Testament do not exist.

Gilbert's interpretation of the meaning of Exod. 12:40 ("Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years," NIV) differs from Hill's and mine. Our interpretation is that the time from Jacob's entry into Egypt and the Exodus was 430 years, and there is a gap in the genealogy given for Aaron and Moses in 1 Chronicles 6. Either one or more generations are omitted, or the lengths of the lives of one or more of those given are not long enough. Gilbert, and Bible scholars before him (for references, see my <http://home.earthlink.net/~mflabar/AgeEarth.htm>), state that the actual length of the captivity was 200 years, which, of course, does not indicate a gap. Why depart from what seems to be the plain meaning? Gilbert cites Gal. 3:16-17, "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed ... What I mean is this: the law, introduced 430 years later ..." (NIV). In other words, these authors are, they say, following Paul in believing that the 430 years refers to the time between the covenant between God and Abraham, and the Exodus.

I disagree. The reason is Scripture itself. Genesis 15:13, which is part of the description of the covenant between God and Abraham, reads as follows: "Then the Lord said to him, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years'" (NIV). I am not a Hebrew scholar, but this reads like it means a captivity of Abraham's descendants in Egypt amounting to considerably more than 200 years. Other Bible scholars agree. One such is Eugene H. Merrill, writing in *Bibliotheca Sacra* ("Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology," 137 [Jul-Sep 1980]: 241-51), who said: "This places the Exodus in 1446 BC ... There is, moreover, the statement in Exod. 12:40 that Israel was in Egypt 430 years, thus yielding the date of 1876 for Jacob's migration there from Canaan" (p. 242).

To reconcile Paul's statement in Galatians with Gen. 15:13, various suggestions have been made. One is that the captivity of Abraham's descendants began with Ishmael. This seems contrived. Genesis 17:19 says that Isaac, not Ishmael, is the son of the covenant. Also, even though Ishmael is described as being the enemy of his neighbors, Scripture says nothing that would suggest captivity for Ishmael's family. It was, after all, Ishmaelites, independent traders, not slaves, who took Joseph to Egypt (Gen. 37:25-28). Another way of reconciling Gen. 15:13 with Gal. 3:16-17 is to say that when Gen. 15:13 said

"a country," it is legitimate to interpret Canaan and Egypt as a single country. I find this a strange interpretation, also. I am not sure what the final explanation is, but the weight of the evidence seems to be with a more literal interpretation of Gen. 15:13 and Exod. 12:40. Hill, Merrill, Francis Schaeffer and others agree.

How can this be reconciled with Paul's statement in Galatians? One possibility is that one of the "promises" Paul included was the promise to Jacob, in Gen. 46:2-5, where God spoke to Jacob at Beersheba, on the way to Egypt to join Joseph, and promised him that his descendants would return to Canaan as a mighty nation. If so, the Exodus could, indeed, have been 430 years after this promise, which was right before the entry into Egypt. That seems no more contrived than some of the arguments for a shorter captivity.

I believe that Scripture teaches that 430 years elapsed between the time when Jacob and his family went to Egypt, and the escape from that country, and, therefore, that there is at least one gap in the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 6. I certainly could be wrong, but this is, at least, a tenable position. Better Bible scholars than I have agreed with it, although certainly not all do.

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More on Genesis Numbers: A Response to Gilbert and LaBar

This brief letter is in response to the letters of William Gilbert (*PSCF* 56, no. 2 [June 2004]: 153-4) and Martin LaBar (above), which refer to my article "Making Sense of the Numbers of Genesis" (*PSCF* 55, no. 4 [Dec. 2003]: 239-51).

Whether or not the "gaps" in the genealogies of the Old Testament exist (LaBar), or do not exist (Gilbert), does not matter with respect to two important points that I was trying to make in my Numbers of Genesis article:

(1) The numbers in the Old Testament are not always meant to be taken at face value. Sometimes they are to be taken numerically as real numbers, and sometimes they are to be taken numerologically as sacred or figurative numbers.

(2) "Gaps" amounting to a few hundred years at the most (if at all) cannot possibly push the biblical chronologies back thousands to tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands years to a "mitochondrial Eve" or "Y-chromosome Adam" as claimed by some concordists. Biblical chronologies place Adam and Eve at about 6,000 years or so ago.

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