# REPOPULATING AFTER THE FLOOD: WAS CAINAN OR SHELAH THE SON OF ARPHAXAD?

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> Arphaxad lived thirty-five years, and begot Salah [or Shelah].
> After he begot Salah, Arphaxad lived four hundred and three
> years, and begot sons and daughters.
>
> – Genesis 11:12-13

> …the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the
> son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of
> Lamech.
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> – Luke 3:35e-36

## I. INTRODUCTION

With only 8 total people on planet earth after the flood, bearing children was obviously a high priority.

Both the Old and New Testaments give genealogies of the sons of Noah. But there is a minor inconsistency between what Moses and Luke report. Moses says that Shelah (=Salah) was the *son* of Arphaxad. Luke says that Shelah was the son of Cainan and the *grandson* of Arphaxad.

There is, of course, a simple way to harmonize these accounts as both being true. The term "begot" refers not only to sons, but to grandsons (or even great-grandsons).

In this paper we will speculate as to why Moses left Cainan out of the genealogy and see why, in any case, this is not evidence that the dates reported in Genesis are thereby unreliable. And, since this issue concerns children born immediately after the flood, our inquiry will necessarily consider the uniqueness of that time for mankind.

## II. WAS CAINAN THE SON OF ARPHAXAD?

There are several spelling variations that together are attested by almost one percent of the manuscripts. Ninety-nine percent have *Cainan*.

Apparently only two omit, P[75v] and D, but no printed text follows their lead. So there is no reasonable doubt that Luke in fact wrote that Shelah was fathered by Cainan, not Arphaxad.

This Cainan has been widely used to justify treating the genealogies in Genesis like accordions—if one name was demonstrably left out in the Genesis account, then who knows how many others were also left out. This Cainan is also used to deny the validity of constructing a strict chronology based on the time spans given in the genealogies.

But where did Luke get this information? The LXX contains Cainan in Gen 11:12, but is so different from the Massoretic text here that it looks like fiction. Recall that the LXX is based on codices Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus, produced centuries after Luke. It is more likely that our LXX is based on Luke than vice versa. Where then did Luke get it?

I understand that Luke obtained the information about this Cainan from records existing in his day, and being correct information was led by the Holy Spirit to include it in his Gospel. This is just like Jude, who quoted Enoch. Enoch's prophecy must have been in existence in Jude's day, but we have no copy in Hebrew today (though Jews are reported to have used one so recently as the 13th century A.D.). Similarly we have no copy of Luke's source.[1]

This brief note was inspired by the discussion of the subject given by Dr. Floyd N. Jones in *Chronology of the Old Testament*[2] (which comes close to solving all the alleged numerical discrepancies in the OT, at least

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[1] Let's recall Luke's stated purpose in writing: "It seemed good to me also, most excellent Theophilus, having taken careful note of everything from above, to write to you with precision and in sequence, so that you may know the certainty of the things in which you were instructed" (Luke 1:3-4). Given his stated purpose in writing, Luke's account must be historically accurate (cf. 2:2 and 3:1). So then, I take it that the Holy Spirit guided Luke to include Cainan.

[2] Floyd Nolen Jones, *Chronology of the Old Testament: A Return to the Basics,* 14th ed. (The Woodlands, TX: Kings Word Press, 1999), 29-36. I imagine that many readers may feel uncomfortable with the author's very dogmatic way of expressing himself, but I would urge them to filter out the rhetorical style and concentrate on the substantial arguments, that are of extraordinary value. For example, his solution to the conundrum of the reigns of the kings on the two sides of the divided monarchy is simply brilliant, and to my mind obviously correct, leaving no loose ends. (In this connection, he debunks the claims of Edwin R. Thiele and William F. Albright.)

as I see it). However, the explanation that follows is original with me (if anyone else has proposed it, I am unaware). Let's recall the exact wording of Gen 11:12-13. "Arphaxad lived thirty-five years, and begot Salah [or Shelah]. After he begot Salah, Arphaxad lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters."

## III. THE TERM "BEGOT"

The verb *begot* requires that Shelah be a blood descendent of Arphaxad, not adopted. He could be the son of a son of Arphaxad, his grandson, or even his great-grandson, etc., except that in this case the time frame only has room for one intervening generation. The plain meaning of the formula in the text, "W lived X years and begot Y; after W begot Y he lived Z years," is that W was X years old when Y was born, is it not?[3] I take the clear meaning of the Hebrew Text to be that Arphaxad was 35 years old when Shelah was born, whatever we may decide to do about "Cainan."

## IV. THE SITUATION IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FLOOD: THE PRIORITY OF CHILDBIRTH

Let's try to imagine the situation in the years immediately following the flood. After the flood the name of the game was to replenish the earth. Indeed, the divine command was: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 9:1). So, whom could Noah's grandsons marry? Obviously their cousins, Noah's granddaughters. There would be an urgency to reproduce—thus, the girls would be married off at puberty, and the boys wouldn't be wasting around either. The women would be giving birth as often as they possibly could. Really, the absolute top priority would be to increase the number of people.

Arphaxad was born two years after the flood, but his wife could have been born a year or two earlier. (The sacred text is clear to the effect that only eight souls entered the ark, but some of the women could have conceived during the flood.)

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[3] It follows that this formula destroys the "accordion" gambit. There were precisely 130 years between Adam and Seth, 105 between Seth and Enosh, 90 between Enosh and Cainan, etc., etc.

## V. THE COLLAPSE OF THE ACCORDION THEORY

Thus, Arphaxad could have fathered Cainan when he was 17 or 18. Similarly, Cainan could have fathered Shelah when he was 17 or 18. In this way Arphaxad could be said to have *begotten* Shelah when he was 35. Cainan could have died early or been passed over in Genesis because the time span did not constitute a generation, or both. Or, as things got back to normal, culturally speaking, the haste with which Arphaxad and Cainan procreated might have been viewed as unseemly. The expedient of omitting Cainan would make the account more normal *while preserving precision as to the elapsed time*.

But Luke would be correct in saying that Shelah was "of" Cainan who was "of" Arphaxad. Shelah was Arphaxad's grandson.

In any case, the Messianic line was passed on by Shelah. Without Luke's record I, for one, would never have stopped to consider what must have happened immediately following the flood—the absolute priority must have been to increase the number of people.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Skeptics point to discrepancies and gleefully suggest that these are errors in God's Word. Yet the more we study such discrepancies, we find that reasonable explanations exist and that often, by meditating on these differences, we are blessed to learn more about God's Word and human history.

Both Moses and Luke were correct. Shelah was the grandson of Arphaxad and the son of Cainan.

Moses was absolutely correct when he said that Arphaxad was precisely 35 years old when Shelah was born. The accordion theory of OT genealogies finds no support here.

Loretta Lynn, the famous coal miner's daughter, bore her first child, a girl, when she was 14. Her daughter in turn had her first child when she too was 14. Thus Loretta Lynn was a grandmother at age 28! Is it really any surprise that immediately after the flood, when childbirth was so vital, that Arphaxad was a grandfather at 35? Hardly.