

## **Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 3, Podcast Audio**

Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to this Deep Dive. Have you ever wondered just how old those stories are from the very beginning of the Bible? You mean like? Like the ones with Adam, Noah, Abraham? Oh yeah. That whole period, you know, before recorded history really starts? Yeah.

That's what we're going to explore today: those primeval timelines. We're using excerpts from a lecture by Old Testament scholar Robert Vannoy. Oh cool.

He brings in archaeology and textual analysis and all that stuff. Nice. So by the end of this, you'll have a way better grasp of what we can actually know about these really, really ancient times.

It's a fascinating area. Oh yeah? Because most people assume that archaeology should like line up perfectly with the biblical account. Like it's a fact-checking thing.

Yeah, like if we dig up enough stuff, we'll have this perfectly dated timeline from like creation onward. Right. But it's not quite that simple.

Exactly. Archaeology has been so valuable. Oh for sure.

In illuminating so many aspects of biblical history. Totally. It helps us understand the cultural and historical context.

Yeah. Of the events described in the Bible. But it's not a simple case of archaeology proving or disproving.

Right. The Bible. So if we can't just rely on archaeology for those super precise dates.

Right. What about all those detailed family trees? . The genealogies we find in Genesis.

I know a lot of people try to figure out when the flood happened or whatever. Yeah. By adding up the lifespans listed in Genesis 5 and 11.

That's a common approach. Yeah. But renowned scholars like William Henry Green and B.B. Warfield.

Oh wow. Yeah. They argued that it's based on a misunderstanding of how those genealogies actually work.

Okay. They're not meant to be strict chronological timelines. So it's not as simple as saying Adam lived to be 930, then Seth lived to be 912.

So that means. Precisely. It's like looking at a simplified family tree with only like a handful of names.

Yeah. And assuming that represents every single generation. Right.

What about all the people in between? Yeah. Those named individuals. Yeah.

There's so much more to the story than what's explicitly stated. Okay. So there's more to these genealogies than meets the eye.

Yeah. What are we missing? Well, one crucial point is that terms like beget or son or bear. Mm-hmm.

In the Bible don't always refer to immediate parentage. Okay. They often signify an ancestor-descendant relationship.

Okay. Not necessarily a direct father-son connection. So, like how in Matthew 1.1. Right.

Jesus is called the son of Abraham. Exactly. And David.

Yes. Even though there were centuries. Right.

And many generations between them. It's about lineage. Right.

Not a precise year-by-year accounting of time. These genealogies are way more concerned with highlighting key figures. Yeah.

And the connections within a family line. Yeah. They're like a carefully curated family history.

Yeah. Focusing on the most important. Yeah.

Individuals and relationships. So they're more like a family history that emphasizes important ancestors rather than like a meticulously detailed complete family tree. But doesn't that make it hard to figure out the timeline? It does.

The events. Particularly because these genealogies often use a technique. Okay.

Called abridgment. Okay. Imagine looking at your own family tree and finding that some distant relatives are missing.

Yeah. That's what happens in biblical genealogies quite a bit. Hold on.

So we're actually missing pieces of the puzzle. That's right. When we try to use these genealogies to like calculate dates and stuff.

And we have clear examples of this. Take Shibuel. Okay.

Who's described as the grandson of Moses in 1 Chronicles 26:24. Okay. He served during King David's reign, which was roughly 400 years after Moses lived. Wow.

That's a big gap. So clearly some generations are missing from that lineage. Wow.

Yeah. Trying to create a precise timeline from these genealogies is like trying to bake a cake with missing ingredients. That's a great analogy.

And we're not even done. Right. Because you can compare two parallel genealogies found in 1 Chronicles 6:3-14 and Ezra 7:1-5. One version has six names that are completely absent in the other one.

Right. Yet both genealogies trace the same line of descent. Exactly.

So we've got missing generations and different versions of the same lineage. Right. It seems like the focus is really on the who and the connection between them.

Precisely. Not on creating a strict timeline. The emphasis is on the lineage and the connection.

Not on providing an absolutely complete list of every single ancestor. These texts were written and compiled in specific cultural and historical contexts. And it's important to read them with that in mind.

Okay. So we can't treat these genealogies like a precise calendar for those really early times. So if we can't use them for dating events, what kind of information do they provide about the past? They offer us valuable insights into the lives and lifespans of the people who lived during those early periods.

For instance, remember those incredibly long lifespans before the Flood. Methuselah lived to be 969. It's hard to even wrap your head around that.

It's almost like a completely different world. Exactly. And while those numbers might not give us precise dates, they do paint a fascinating picture of a humanity that was in some ways quite different from our own.

Totally. Think about the implications of such long lifespans. Yeah.

How might that have affected their perception of time, their relationships, their understanding of mortality? That's a really interesting point. It's like those numbers are giving us glimpses into individual lives and experiences rather than just data points for a timeline. Exactly.

It makes you wonder what it was like to live in a world where people routinely lived for centuries? Absolutely. And it raises even more questions about the social structures and the cultural beliefs that might have shaped their lives. Totally.

These genealogies, even with their abridged nature, provide a unique window into a world that's both familiar and profoundly different from our own. So even though we can't use these genealogies as a strict chronological tool, they still have immense value. They're not just about dates.

They're about people, their relationships, and their experiences in a world vastly different from ours. Precisely. They're like threads connecting different generations, weaving together a tapestry of family history and offering us a glimpse into the human experience in those ancient times.

It's amazing how something as seemingly simple as a list of names can unlock so much about the past. I know. It's amazing.

So what should we be taking away from all this? What's the key takeaway for our listeners? Well, the Bible isn't primarily concerned with giving us a precise year-by-year chronology of history. What is it trying to communicate through these genealogies and narratives? That's a great question. It makes you realize that there's always more to discover in these ancient texts, like layers of meaning waiting to be uncovered.

But before we get too deep into that, let's quickly recap what we've learned so far. We've seen that pinning down exact dates for the primeval period is more complicated than just adding up the years listed in those biblical genealogies. We've learned that those genealogies often employ abridgment, skipping over generations to emphasize lineage and key figures.

And we've started to think about the deeper message these texts might be conveying. We've also explored the intriguing insights these genealogies offer about the lives and experiences of people in those early periods, their long lifespans, their relationships, their place in a world vastly different from our own. Absolutely.

All of these offer a glimpse into a fascinating and often overlooked aspect of biblical history. I think so. So while we can't use these genealogies as a precise historical timeline, they offer something even richer.

A window into the human story that unfolds within those ancient pages. Yeah. And that I think is something worth pondering.

Yes. What are the deeper truths embedded within these stories and lineages? What are they trying to tell us about God? Humanity, our place in this grand narrative of history. Those are questions worth exploring further.

Totally. And as we continue our dive into the primeval period, remember that the Bible offers us more than just a chronological timeline. Yeah.

It invites us into a story. Yeah. A relationship and a way of life that transcends the constraints of time and space.

That's a powerful thought. Yeah. And it leads us to an even deeper level of inquiry.

Yeah. But we'll have to save that for the next part of our deep dive. Yes.

Stay tuned. So we've established that these genealogies are more like carefully curated family histories. Right.

With a focus on lineage and key figures. Yes. Rather than strict timelines.

Right. But if simply adding up the years isn't the right approach, how should we think about dating those early events? That's a complex question. Yeah.

And scholars have differing perspectives. Yeah. Some use a combination of biblical clues.

Okay. Archaeological evidence. .

Ancient Near Eastern chronologies. Wow. To create approximate timelines.

Yeah. It's a bit like piecing together a puzzle. Yeah.

With some missing pieces. The Vannoy talks about Genesis 11:10, where it says Shem became the ancestor of Arphaxad two years after the flood. Right.

But as he points out, the Hebrew word translated as begat doesn't necessarily mean direct parentage. Right. It could mean Shem was Arphaxad's great, great, great, great grandfather.

Yeah. With several generations in between. That's right.

That highlights the challenges. Exactly. Of trying to establish a rigid timeline.

. There's still room for interpretation. Yeah.

Especially when dealing with ancient texts and languages. So it seems like trying to pinpoint the exact year of events like the creation or the flood might be a bit of a wild goose chase. It might be more productive to focus on understanding, like, the message.

Okay. And the theological significance of these texts. Yeah.

Rather than getting bogged down and trying to create a rigid timeline. Right. Remember these texts were written in a different time.

Yeah. And with a different purpose. Yeah.

Than modern historical accounts. I think that's a really important point. We can appreciate the richness of these stories and the insights they offer.

Yeah. Without needing to know the exact year everything happened. Absolutely.

It's like appreciating a great work of art. Yeah. You don't need to know the exact date it was painted to be moved by its beauty and meaning.

That's a great analogy. Yeah. And it challenges us to think about what's truly important.

Yeah. If the Bible isn't primarily concerned with precise historical dates, what is it trying to communicate to us through these genealogies and narratives? What are like the deeper truths that transcend the constraints of time? That's a question worth pondering. It's almost like these genealogies are pointing us towards something bigger.

Right. Something beyond just a list of names and dates. They're like signposts guiding us through a larger story.

Okay. A story about God's relationship with humanity. About lineage and covenant.

Right. And ultimately about the coming of the Messiah. That's a powerful way to think about it.

Yeah. These genealogies become part of a grand narrative. A story that unfolds across generations and connects us to something much larger than ourselves.

And it invites us to consider our own place within that story. Oh wow. Where do we fit into this grand tapestry of human history? Yeah.

And God's unfolding plan. That's a thought-provoking question. Yeah.

It makes you realize that these ancient texts are still relevant today. Absolutely. Speaking to us across the centuries.

Right. And challenging us to think about our own lives and beliefs. Right.

They remind us that we're part of something bigger. Yeah. Something that transcends time.

And connects us to the past, present, and future. That's a beautiful way to put it. Yeah.

It's like those genealogies are not just about tracing ancestry. Right. But about understanding our place in the grand scheme of things.

Exactly. They invite us to consider our own legacy. The impact we have on future generations.

Right. And the ways in which our lives are intertwined with the lives of those who came before us. Yeah.

And those who will come after. That's a powerful message. Yeah.

It's not just about knowing the past. Right. But about understanding how the past shapes the present and the future.

And it reminds us that even though we may not be able to pinpoint the exact dates. Yeah. Of every event in biblical history.

The stories and genealogies. Right. Still hold immense value and meaning for us today.

Totally. They offer us a glimpse into the human experience. Yeah.

A connection to our spiritual heritage. And a deeper understanding of God's plan for humanity. So even though we might not be able to construct a precise timeline.

Right. From these genealogies. Yeah.

We can still learn from them. Yes. Be inspired by them.

Absolutely. And find meaning in them. It's like they offer us a different kind of knowledge.

Okay. A knowledge that goes beyond dates and facts. Right.

And speaks to something deeper within us. Precisely. It's about recognizing the richness and complexity.

Yeah. Of these ancient texts. .

And appreciating the multiple layers of meaning they contain. Totally. And it's about allowing those meanings to shape our understanding of ourselves.

Yeah. Our world. Mm-hmm.

And our place in God's story. So instead of viewing these genealogies as a frustratingly incomplete timeline. Right.

We can see them in a rich tapestry of human experience, faith, and lineage. Yeah. That continues to resonate with us today.

That's a great way to summarize it. Yeah. It's about moving beyond the limitations of a strictly chronological approach.

Right. And embracing the multifaceted nature of these texts. Okay.

So we've debunked the myth of using genealogies as a precise chronology. Right. And we've explored the deeper insights they offer about the human story.

Yes. But if we can't rely on these genealogies for precise dating. Right.

What other clues can we use? That's where things get even more fascinating. Okay. We need to look beyond the genealogies themselves.

Mm-hmm. And consider the broader historical and cultural context. Okay.

Of the biblical narrative. Okay. This includes examining archaeological findings.

Yep. Analyzing ancient Near Eastern texts and chronologies. Okay.

And studying the literary conventions and historical practices of the time. So it's like becoming a detective. Exactly.

Piecing together clues from various sources to get a clearer picture. Right. Of the past.

And that's what makes studying biblical history so engaging. I love that image. Yeah.

Of being like a detective of the ancient world. It's a process of discovery. Yeah.

A journey that takes us through different disciplines. And challenges us to think critically and creatively about the evidence we find. It makes you realize that there's so much more to learn and explore.

Yeah. Beyond just the surface level of the text. And that's what makes studying the Bible so rewarding.

Totally. It's a lifelong pursuit. Yeah.

That continually invites us to dig deeper. Ask questions.

And discover new insights. Speaking of digging deeper. Right.

Van Noy also talks about how the numbers in those genealogies Can reveal something important about the lives of those early people.

Yes. Remember those incredibly long lifespans we were talking about? Yes. Those lifespans offer fascinating insights.

Yeah. Into the human experience in those early periods.

While we might not take them literally. Right. As precise chronological markers.

Yeah. They do raise intriguing questions. Right.

About the nature of humanity, longevity. . And the relationship between God and humankind.

Yeah. In those early times. It's almost like those lifespans challenge us to consider what it means to be human.

Right. In a world so different from our own. Exactly.

Did they experience time differently? Yeah. Did their understanding of mortality and eternity differ from ours? Those are great questions. Yeah.

And they highlight the value of approaching these texts with both a critical and a curious mind. Yeah. We can question assumptions, explore alternative interpretations.

. And delve into the deeper implications. Right.

Of what we read. It's like we're invited to not just read the text. Yeah.

But to engage with it. Yeah. To wrestle with it.

To let it challenge our own perspectives and assumptions. Exactly. And that's how we truly grow in our understanding and appreciation of these ancient texts.

Yeah. It's a process of continual learning, questioning, and discovery. So we've talked about the limitations of using genealogies as a precise timeline.

Right. The deeper insights they offer about the human experience. Yeah.

And the importance of considering the broader historical and cultural context. But what about those incredibly long lifespans? What can we learn from them? Right.

And how do they fit into our understanding of the primeval period? That's a topic that deserves its own deep dive. Really? And it's one that can shed light on the worldviews,



beliefs, and even the physical realities of the people who lived in those ancient times. So let's delve into the fascinating world of primeval lifespans.

Right. And explore what they might reveal about the human story. Let's do it.

Okay. I'm ready to dive in. Okay.

Let's explore what these long lifespans can tell us. Yeah. About those who lived in the time before recorded history.

Okay. So we're diving into those crazy long lifespans from Genesis. Yeah.

It's one thing to say people lived for hundreds of years, but what does that actually tell us about life back then? It's easy to just get caught up in the wow factor of those numbers, but they offer us a glimpse into a world that was so different from our own. Vannoy suggests we think of them as snapshots of individual lives, not just data points on a timeline. So instead of getting bogged down in how they lived so long, we should focus on what their lifespans might reveal about their experiences.

Exactly. Those numbers can give us insights into their understanding of time, mortality, even their relationship with God. Imagine a world where 900 years is a lifespan, not an anomaly.

Their perception of time would have been totally different from ours. For sure. It makes you wonder if they even thought about aging the same way we do.

Right. Did they have the same anxieties about getting older, about running out of time? That's a fascinating question. Perhaps their understanding of mortality was just different given their crazy long lifespans.

Maybe they saw life as this long, slow unfolding, not a race against the clock. And what about their relationship with God? Did those long lifespans influence their faith or understanding of the divine? It's certainly possible. Imagine the accumulation of wisdom and experience.

Oh, wow. Yeah. Over centuries.

Yeah. Could that have fostered a deeper, more profound connection with the spiritual realm? It's like they had centuries to contemplate the big questions. Right.

To deepen their understanding of God's creation. Yeah. Their faith wasn't something they just picked up and put down.

Right. It was woven into the very fabric of their long lives. That's a beautiful way to put it.

Yeah. And it makes you realize that these lifespans, whether literal or symbolic, they challenge us to think about our own relationship with time. Right.

Mortality. Yeah. And the divine.

It makes you pause and reflect on how our fast-paced, time-obsessed culture shapes our own views. Absolutely. Maybe there's something to be learned from those ancient patriarchs.

Yeah. And their unhurried lives. Perhaps they teach us that true wisdom comes not from cramming more into our years.

Okay. But from living each moment with intention and depth. Right.

From savoring the journey. Yeah. Rather than rushing toward the destination.

It's a profound thought. Maybe those long lifespans. Yeah.

Even if we don't totally understand them. Right. Serve as a reminder to slow down.

Yeah. To appreciate the present moment. Absolutely.

And to nurture our connection with the eternal. Exactly. And to remember that the Bible, even in its most ancient stories.

Yeah. Speaks to these timeless truths. Right.

That transcend the constraints of time and space. So we've come full circle. We have.

We started by trying to use genealogies to date events. Yeah. And we've ended up exploring these super profound questions.

We have. About the human experience. Yes.

The nature of time. . Our relationship with God.

And that's the beauty of the deep dive. Yeah. You set out to explore one specific topic.

Right. And you end up uncovering these layers of meaning and insight. Totally.

That you never anticipated. It's a reminder that the Bible is not just a book of facts and figures. Right.

It's a living text that continues to speak to us. Yes. In new and surprising ways.

Absolutely. It challenges us. Inspires us.

And invites us to engage in this lifelong journey. Yeah. Of discovery and understanding.

And perhaps that's the most important takeaway from our deep dive. Okay. It's not about finding all the answers.

Right. But about embracing the mystery. The wonder.

Yeah. And the ongoing exploration that makes studying the Bible. Yeah.

Such a rewarding experience. Well said. And to our listener.

Yeah. We leave you with this final thought. Okay.

As you continue to explore the Bible, remember that it's not just about what happened in the past. Right. It's about what those stories reveal about ourselves.

Yeah. About our world. Yeah.

And about the timeless truths that connect us all. Yes. Keep asking questions.

Keep seeking understanding. Absolutely. And keep diving deep into that rich tapestry of faith, history, and humanity.

Yeah. That unfolds within those sacred pages. Beautiful.

Thanks for joining us on this deep dive.