

120 Years

“My spirit will not tolerate man indefinitely, because he is only flesh. Accordingly, his days will amount to 120 years.”—(Ge 6:3)

Current Thinking

[*it-2* p. 507] Jehovah set a time limit for the existence of that ungodly world... This was a divine judicial decree.

[*w12 4/15* p. 23] This was... a judicial decree in which Jehovah declared when he would act to cleanse the earth of ungodliness.

[*w10 12/15* p. 31] It is logical... to conclude that Genesis 6:3 expresses God's resolve to end the corrupt system of things on earth. Jehovah issued a judicial decree to do so in 120 years,

This being a topic for a *Question From Readers* shows that many have wondered if this scripture is not Jehovah saying that the flood will occur in 120 years from the time he said it, but is instead Jehovah informing us of His decision to change the maximum life span for mankind from 1,000 years to 120 years. (Ge 2:17)

Starting Point

One aspect of the argument is that a length of time is of no use without a starting point. For instance, if I wrote you a note and left it on your desk (while you were out of your office) asking you to call me in exactly 45 minutes. When you got back to your desk and read the note you would not know when to call me because you did not know when the 45 minute countdown began.

The same goes for the 120 year countdown theory for Genesis 6:3. It is useless information without a starting point for the countdown. If this were a countdown that Jehovah deemed important enough to include in the Bible then why didn't He also provide the requisite start time?

And if Jehovah was speaking to spirit creatures in heaven why did He use a timeframe of man (years) to describe it? Is time in heaven set by how long it takes the earth to circle the Sun? If the heavenly time was just converted into an earthy amount, it is odd that it equaled to exactly 120 human years.

Let's break down that scripture and see what it tells us.

man

(Genesis 6:3) Then Jehovah said: “My spirit will not tolerate man indefinitely, because he is only flesh. Accordingly, his days will amount to 120 years.”

The Hebrew word "adam" translated as "*man*" has the meaning of mankind. The same Hebrew word is also used at Genesis 5:2.

(Genesis 5:2) Male and female he created them. On the day they were created, he blessed them and named them Man.—(see also Ge 1:26)

Each of the first 7 verses of Genesis chapter 6 contain the original Hebrew word translated as "men" or "man" which refers to the human species. It does not have the meaning of 'these men' or 'those men' singling out the specific humans on the planet at the time. It refers to 'mankind' in general, as a species.

his days

(Genesis 6:3) Then Jehovah said: "My spirit will not tolerate man indefinitely, because he is only flesh. Accordingly, his days will amount to 120 years."

The Hebrew word "yamaw" translated as "*his days*" refers to the life span of a man. That Hebrew word is used in many other scriptures, including Psalm 144:4.

(Psalm 144:4) Man resembles a mere breath; His days are like a passing shadow.—(see also De 22:19, 29; 1Ki 15:14; 2Ki 15:18; 2Ch 15:17; Job 7:1; 14:5; Ps 103:5; Isa 65:20)

will amount to

(Genesis 6:3) Then Jehovah said: "My spirit will not tolerate man indefinitely, because he is only flesh. Accordingly, his days will amount to 120 years."

The Hebrew word "wehayu" translated as "*will amount to*" means "will become". That Hebrew word is used in several other scriptures such as Genesis 2:24.

(Genesis 2:24) That is why a man will leave his father and his mother and he will stick to his wife, and they will become one flesh. —(see also Ex 4:9; 30:20; Le 25:45; Nu 3:12)

Outro

So let's put together what we found by replacing the words in the verse with what they mean.

(Genesis 6:3) Then Jehovah said: "My spirit will not tolerate **(mankind)** indefinitely, because he is only flesh. Accordingly, **(mankind's) (life span) (will become)** 120 years."

It seems that this verse is not saying that mankind's existence would end in 120 years. If that were the case then Jehovah failed because mankind did not end. It lived on through Noah's family.

List

Here is a list of the generations born after the flood, followed by their age at death.

(Note: all dates are B.C.E.)

1st generation - Arpachshad 438 (2368-1930)

2nd generation - Shelah 433 (2333-1900)

3rd generation - Eber 464 (2303-1839)

4th generation - Peleg 239 (2269-2030)

5th generation - Reu 239 (2239-2000)

6th generation - Serug 230 (2207-1977)

7th generation - Nahor 148 (2177-2029)

8th generation - Terah 205 (2148-1943)

9th generation - Abraham 175 (2018-1843) "died at a good old age, old and satisfied"—Ge 25:8

Sarah (wife of Abraham) 127 (2008-1881)

10th generation - Ishmael 137 (1932-1795)

Isaac 180 (1918-1738)

11th generation - Jacob (Israel) 147 (1858-1711)

12th generation - Joseph 110 (1767-1657)

Levi 137

13th generation - Manasseh 65 or 66

Kohath 133

14th generation - Amram 137

15th generation - Aaron 123 (1597-1474)

Moses 120 (1593-1473)

Moses

Moses' life was ended by Jehovah at 120 years of age. He was in good health but was not allowed to live any longer.

(Deuteronomy 31:1, 2) Then Moses went out and spoke these words to all Israel, ² saying to them: "I am 120 years old today. I can no longer lead you, for Jehovah has said to me, 'You will not cross this Jordan.'

(Deuteronomy 31:14) Jehovah then said to Moses: "Look! The time has drawn near for you to die.

(Deuteronomy 34:7) Moses was 120 years old at his death. His eyes had not grown dim, and his strength had not departed.

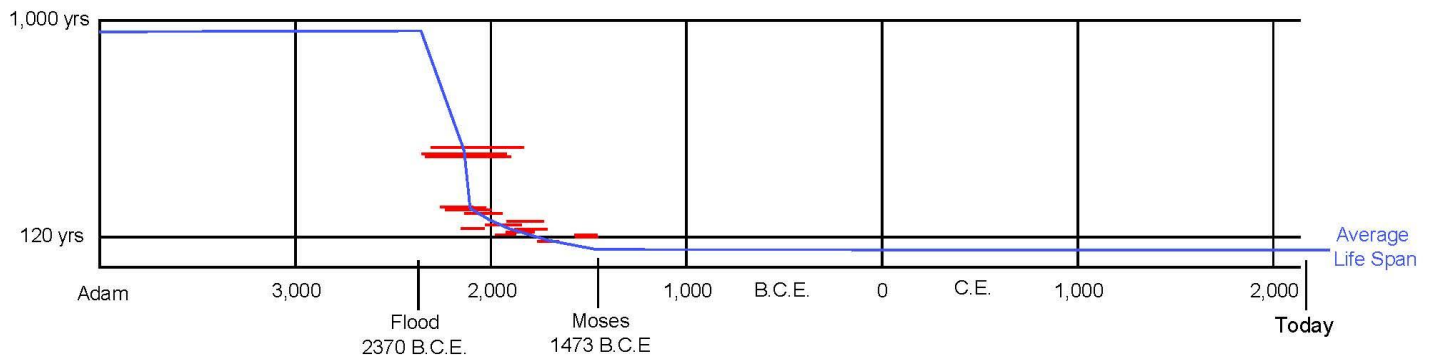
After Aaron no one else is recorded in the Bible as living past 120 years of age.

Graph

I added the life span of those in the list above who have known born/death dates to the following graph as horizontal red lines. The length of line represents how long they lived as does how high up the line is from the bottom.

The blue line shows the average life span as it dropped for those born after the flood.

Graph 1:



It took less than one pre-flood maximum life span (1,000 years - Ge 2:17) for the average life span to drop below 120 years. Though it happened rather quickly the change to a 120 year maximum life span was not instant. Just as when Jehovah confused the languages of the builders of the city of Babylon to disperse them, the result was somewhat gradual. (Ge 11:8)

By Moses' death, the average life span was down to 70 or 80 years.—[w10 12/15 p. 30]

Job also references a time limit:

(Job 14:5) If his days are decided, The number of his months is with you; You have set a limit for him that he may not go beyond.

A date for him to die was not set, but a limit was set that he could not go beyond.

Waiting

First Peter has been said to show that the 120 years was how long Jehovah waited until the flood.

(1 Peter 3:19, 20) And in this state he went and preached to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ who had formerly been disobedient when God was patiently waiting in Noah's day, while the ark was being constructed, in which a few people, that is, eight souls, were carried safely through the water.

Noah's three sons were born, grew to adulthood, and then got married before Jehovah instructed Noah to build the ark. *"Consequently, it is likely that only 40 or 50 years then remained before the Deluge."*—[it-2 p. 507]

That would have made the majority of Jehovah's wait time before the ark's construction even began. But 1 Peter 3:20 says that Jehovah waited patiently "while" the ark was being constructed.

It does not say that He waited for the construction to begin. Or that He waited for the ark to be constructed, which could include the time leading up to its construction. But it only says that He was waiting during its construction.

If a 120 year deadline for the flood was already set, then that is what Jehovah would have been waiting for and nothing else. Whatever happened in the meantime was inconsequential to the deadline and would not have prolonged or shortened His wait time.

No, but 1 Peter 3:20 tells us that He was waiting for the ark's construction to be finished, which means that is what set the start time for the flood to begin. Nowhere does it say that Noah needed to hurry to meet the 120 year deadline, or that he got the ark built just in time for the 120 year deadline. The 120 years are never mentioned in connection to the flood or the ark.

Blessing

No doubt the shortened life span of humans was a blessing for mankind throughout history. It would have been a terrible life for the lowly masses to live under the ruthless rulership of evil men who gained positions of power over long periods of time and ruled heartlessly for several hundred years. A short human life span ensured that that didn't happen.

(Proverbs 28:15) Like a growling lion and a charging bear Is a wicked ruler over a helpless people.

Though man's wicked nature remained within him, his shortened life span prevented him from building up the ability over long periods of time to implement his wicked desires on a large scale. There are still of course men who have committed wickedness on a grand scale in history, but they are a very small percentage of the population and their time in power was short lived. Think how bad the earth would be if a large percentage of the men on earth had the time to implement their wicked desires and could remain in power for hundreds of years.

And the nature of life after the flood helped reel in man's wicked desires as well. He was typically too busy working at his own existence to do much else. By the time a man establishes himself, that is to say, becomes an adult, procures a home and raises a family, he is typically over the hill and doesn't have much time left to cause much damage on a large scale. (Ec 3:10)

Natural

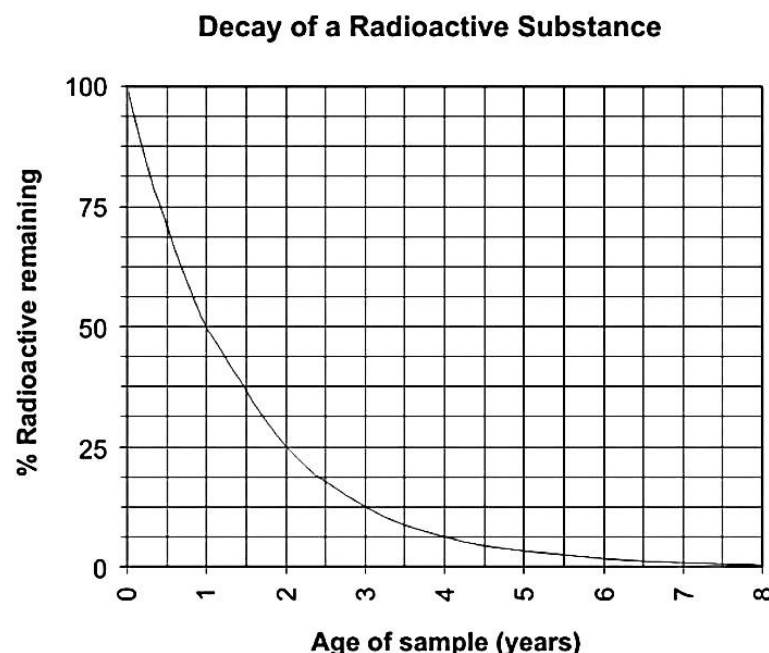
Jehovah tends to use natural things to accomplish His goals. He created all things, knows how they work and interact with each other, and knows how to manipulate them to accomplish His desires.

What did Jehovah want to accomplish? The reduction of the amount of time God's spirit must "*tolerate*" man's wicked nature. (Ge 6:3) How would He do that? By vastly reducing mankind's life span. How did He accomplish it? By dropping the waters above the waters and bringing the vast amounts of underground water to the surface which flooded the earth. What were the results? The long lived wicked men on the earth were wiped out and mankind's life span dropped to below 120 years.

Immediately after the flood the ages of men began a dramatic decline, like an electric motor slowing down when switched to a slower speed setting. If you look at the diagram above, those of you familiar with radiation may notice a similarity.

When scientists speak of anything radioactive they tend to refer to its "half-life". The half-life of a radioactive substance is how long it takes it to reduce by half. It then takes the same amount of time for it to reach half of that strength, and so on. For instance, if a radioactive particle had the strength of 1,000 rads and a half-life of 100 years, does that mean it will be inert in 200 years? No. In 100 years it will have dropped in strength by half to 500 rads, and in another 100 years the 500 rads will be cut in half to 250 rads, then after another 100 years it will be at 125 rads. So with each half-life it is reduced by half of what it currently is. Below is a typical half-life graph. If you'll notice, at each year the strength is reduced by half.

Graph 2:



Shem, the son of Noah, lived 498 years after the flood. That's half of the pre-flood maximum life span. Looking at graph 1 you can see that the first ones born after the flood lived almost as long as Shem, then the next group lived an average life span of half of that, and so on, closely duplicating the natural half-life reduction of a radioactive substance.

Perhaps the gaseous water layer that had surrounded the earth in the upper atmosphere blocked some natural radiation, allowing mankind to live much longer. Or, and this seems to match the data better, perhaps the upper water layer held in something that gave us a longer life span, and when that water layer was removed it was released into space. Or the lack of the upper water layer no longer blocked radiation that rendered inert or killed-off a life prolonging substance. Whatever the case, it would seem that the life span extending substance that is now gone had a half-life of about 500 years.

Perhaps that "something" that gave mankind long life came from the ground water (Ge 7:11), and after Armageddon Jehovah will return things to the way they were, which is why it is the river of life issuing out of the ground that will return our longevity. Of course eternal life is provided only by Jehovah.—(Eze 47:1; Zec 14:8; Re 22:1)

What do *you* think of this hypothesis?

:^)

Dave

da.getmyip@gmail.com

Last edited 03-06-2019

(date created 01-09-2010)