

Human Life Span after the Flood

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The decline in life span after Noah's Flood as reported in the Bible has been of interest to me for some time for two reasons. First, are there clues in this reported data that would help confirm the scientific and historical accuracy of the Bible, and, second, are there clues that would help us achieve a longer span of quality life today?

At the present time, the typical male life span in developed countries is in the order of 80 years, and an increasing number of people are living to over 100 years with there being an estimated 450,000 centenarians in 2015.¹ However, a study published in *Nature* in 2016 suggests that the maximum human life span likely to be attainable is around 125 years.²

Before Noah's Flood, the Bible records that the Patriarchs routinely lived to be around 900 years of age, but after the Flood the life spans had declined to around 120 years by the time of Moses and Joshua. Why did this decline happen? And why is there now an apparent age ceiling of only 125 years?

Recent studies of human aging suggest that longevity is a combination of genetics and lifestyle.³ From a lifestyle perspective, the recommended diet for the pre-Flood patriarchs was plant based, and they had to grow their own food and walk most places—everything was done manually. So we have the combination of diet and exercise. Now we have growing evidence, popularized by books such as *Forks over Knives* and *The Blue Zone Solution*, that a plant-based diet and exercise are probably the two main lifestyle factors that contribute to longevity that apply today.

Genetics, on the other hand, paints a very different picture. Mutations in genes can adversely affect the maintenance of cells and their basic metabolism and are involved in modulating life span. It is revealing that human mitochondrial DNA is steadily accumulating mutations. In fact, from current estimates of the rates at which the human genome is accumulating mutations, it has been suggested that life on Earth cannot be millions of years old because during that time, mutations producing defects would have accumulated to the point that life could no longer survive.

Dr. J. C. Sanford, who was a genetics researcher at Cornell University, has found that the decline in life span after the Flood is not unlike what would be expected from a genomic decay curve. The high fit of the biblical age records with a scientific prediction provides strong evidence that the ages recorded are historically accurate.⁴

Walter Makous, Professor of Brain and Cognitive Sciences and of Visual Science at the University of Rochester, has critically evaluated the biblical numbers to answer the question of whether or not these biblical ages represent actual longevities or are fabricated. His analysis showed that the “mathematical properties of these numbers favor natural origin. In other words, the biblical longevities as a set are likely to be true.”⁵

What then could explain the sudden rapid increase in the rate of genetic mutations after the Flood as suggested by the shape of the declining age curve? A cancer research paper published a few years ago may provide a clue.⁶ The researchers reported that when cancer patients were given water that had reduced levels of heavy water (that is, water containing the heavier hydrogen isotope, deuterium), they survived longer. This finding is consistent with observations that when the deuterium content of water is increased, the number of mutations in the cell DNA increases.

Therefore, changes in environmental conditions before and after the Flood, such as heavy water content in the biosphere, are likely to have increased the rate of DNA mutations and reduced life span. Of course, another environmental factor that is likely to have contributed

to a reduced life span is the introduction of flesh foods. The original Edenic diet was plant based (Gen. 1:29; 3:18). Then, after the Flood, flesh foods were permitted (Gen. 9:3–4). There is a growing body of evidence that a high-animal-protein diet is associated with reduced life expectancy.⁷

There is substantial evidence from the fossil record that Earth's climate prior to the Flood was quite different to the post-Flood climate seen today. Lush forests covered all of the continents on earth including Antarctica, and land and ocean temperatures were warmer. Carbon dioxide levels were higher and the lush vegetation probably resulted in higher oxygen levels in the air. How the pre-Flood climate affected life span and whether there were other factors affecting life spans in some way such as the strength of the earth's magnetic field and cosmic ray flux are unknown. From what we can study today, accelerated genomic decay after the Flood combined with the introduction of flesh foods provides a reasonable explanation.

What I have discussed in this chapter is just a small snippet of evidence that supports the claim that the Bible is a divinely inspired document and that the health and lifestyle guides contained in it are the best advice for those of us living today.

NOTES

50 Human Life Span after the Flood

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