THE QUESTION

When did God shorten the long lives people lived in Genesis?

Asked by a THF member on October 29, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 6 numbered quotations · the 10 early Christian passages and 101 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/when-did-god-shorten-the-long-lives-people-lived-in-genesis

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

The early writers place the main change at the flood. Lactantius says lives of up to a thousand years were then cut back step by step, generation by generation, to a limit of 120 years, so that long life would not again feed evil. Julius Africanus read the 120 years differently, as a countdown to the flood.

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POINT 1 OF 6

Death came with sin, but life stayed long

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Lactantius says death entered by God's sentence after the fall. Even so, human life could still last close to a thousand years, and it stayed that way until the flood.

1

> "Then death came upon man according to God's sentence. Yet his life, though it had become temporary, still had a limit of a thousand years, and that was the length of human life until the flood."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 27 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 9, page 5** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 6

After the flood, lives grew shorter

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

In his shorter summary, Lactantius names the flood as the turning point. From then on lives became shorter over time until they came down to about 120 years.

2

> "For after the flood, the life of men was gradually shortened and was reduced to a hundred and twenty years."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 27 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 9, page 5** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 6

Shorter lives were a check on evil

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Lactantius also gives a reason. Long lives had given people more time to plan wickedness before the flood. So God shortened life in each new generation and set 120 years as the upper limit.

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3 “So that long life might not again become a cause for devising evil, He gradually shortened the lifespan of man in each succeeding generation, and set a limit of one hundred and twenty years, which it would not be permitted to exceed.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Divine Institutes* 14 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 8, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 6

Another view: 120 years until the flood

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Julius Africanus read Genesis 6:3 another way. He notes that some people lived longer than 120 years afterward. So he takes the number as the time left for that sinful generation before the flood came.

4 “Nor should this be thought difficult, because some lived afterward for a longer time than that. For the time meant was 100 years until the flood, in the case of the sinners of that time; for they were 20 years old.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Julius Africanus,** *Extant Writings* 1 (c. 232–265 AD) **Source 6, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 6

Life spans kept shrinking over time

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Cyprian, answering critics who blamed Christians for a worn-out world, points to how far human life had fallen. Lives of eight or nine hundred years had become lives that rarely reach a hundred.

5 “And though human life once lasted beyond eight or nine hundred years, now it can hardly reach one hundred years.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 7, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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POINT 6 OF 6

Moses reached the full 120 years

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Hippolytus notes that Moses lived 120 years with his strength still whole. This matches the 120-year limit that Lactantius describes, though Hippolytus does not make that link himself here.

6 “Moses lived 120 years. His eyesight was not dim, and the skin of his face was not wrinkled.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Exegetical Fragments* (c. 200–236 AD) **Source 4, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not give an exact year or generation when the 120-year limit was reached.
- The writers do not agree on whether Genesis 6:3 set a lifespan limit or a countdown to the flood.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 10 early Christian passages and 101 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–10, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 11–85, in Bible order), then 26 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *10 passages from 7 writers*

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Against Heresies: Book V* (1885 English) “also the Lord declares, “The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God.” As, therefore, it might seem to the men of the present day, who are ignorant… [continues online] **read ›**

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2 *Against Heresies: Book V* (1885 English) “In order to learn] that bodies did continue in existence for a lengthened period, as long as it was God’s good pleasure that they should flourish, let [these heretics… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · source 3*

3 *Stromata* 6.11 (1885 English) “days of men shall be, it is said, 120 (ρκ´) years… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · source 4*

4 *Exegetical Fragments* (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** “Moses lived 120 years; nor was his eye dim, nor was the skin of his face wrinkled… [continues online] **read ›**

Dionysius of Alexandria, *c. 232–265 AD · source 5*

5 *Miscellaneous Fragments* 1 (1885 English; on point 5) “among these is man himself, as a certain holy scripture says of him: Man that is born of woman is of few days… [continues online] **read ›**

Julius Africanus, *c. 232–265 AD · source 6*

6 *Extant Writings* 1 **Quote 4, page 3** “decreed to destroy the whole race of the living by a… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · source 7*

7 *Treatises* (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 3** “they no longer, as formerly, have the same facilities, in the hearing of their ears, in the swiftness of their feet, in the keenness of their eyes, in the vigour… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · sources 8–10*

8 *Divine Institutes* 14 **Quote 3, page 3** “afterward, when God saw that the earth was full of wickedness and crimes, He decided to destroy mankind with a flood. However, to restore the human race, He chose one… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 27 **Quotes 1, 2, page 2** “after the flood, the life of men was gradually shortened and was reduced to a hundred and twenty years… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Divine Institutes* 13 (on point 1) “because Varro did not know why or when the life of man… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *75 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

11 **Genesis 3:22** Then God said, “Behold, Adam has become like one of us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he stretch out his hand and take from the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” **read ›**

12 **Genesis 4:15** The Lord God said to him, “Not so; whoever kills Cain shall pay a sevenfold penalty.” And the Lord God set a sign on Cain, so that no one who found him would kill him. **read ›**

13 **Genesis 5:3** Adam lived two hundred and thirty years, and he fathered a son according to his own form and according to his own image, and he called his name Seth. **read ›**

14 **Genesis 5:4** The days of Adam that he lived after he fathered Seth were seven hundred years, and he fathered sons and daughters. **read ›**

15 **Genesis 5:5** So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died. **read ›**

16 **Genesis 5:8** So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died. **read ›**

17 **Genesis 5:11** So all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years, and he died. **read ›**

18 **Genesis 5:20** So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years, and he died. **read ›**

19 **Genesis 5:23** So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. **read ›**

20 **Genesis 5:25** Methuselah lived a hundred and sixty-seven years and fathered Lamech. **read ›**

21 **Genesis 5:26** After he fathered Lamech, Methuselah lived eight hundred and two years, and he fathered sons and daughters. **read ›**

22 **Genesis 5:27** So all the days that Methuselah lived were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and he died. **read ›**

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23 **Genesis 5:29** He called his name Noah, saying, “This one will give us rest from our works, and from the sorrows of our hands, and from the ground that the Lord God has cursed.” **read ›**

24 **Genesis 5:30** After he fathered Noah, Lamech lived five hundred and sixty-five years, and he fathered sons and daughters. **read ›**

25 **Genesis 5:31** So all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and fifty-three years, and he died. **read ›**

26 **Genesis 6:3** Then the Lord God said, “My Spirit shall certainly not remain among these men forever, because they are flesh; but their days shall be a hundred and twenty years.” **read ›**

27 **Genesis 6:13** Then the Lord God said to Noah, “The time of every man has come before me, because the earth has been filled with unrighteousness by them; and behold, I am destroying them and the earth. **read ›**

28 **Genesis 7:6** Noah was six hundred years old, and the flood of water came upon the earth. **read ›**

29 **Genesis 7:10** After the seven days, the water of the flood came upon the earth. **read ›**

30 **Genesis 7:11** In the six hundredth year of the life of Noah, in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the abyss were broken open, and the floodgates of heaven were opened. **read ›**

31 **Genesis 7:24** The water rose high upon the earth a hundred and fifty days. **read ›**

32 **Genesis 8:13** In the six hundred and first year of Noah’s life, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the water was gone from the earth. Noah took off the covering of the ark that he had made and saw that the water was gone from the face of the earth. **read ›**

33 **Genesis 8:21** The Lord God smelled a pleasing aroma, and the Lord God considered and said, “I will not again curse the earth because of the works of men, for the mind of man is intently set on evil things from his youth. So I will not again strike all living flesh, as I have done. **read ›**

34 **Genesis 9:28** After the flood Noah lived three hundred and fifty years. **read ›**

35 **Genesis 9:29** All the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died. **read ›**

36 **Genesis 11:8** So the Lord scattered them from there over the face of all the earth, and they stopped building the city and the tower. **read ›**

37 **Genesis 11:10** These are the generations of Shem. Shem was a hundred years old when he fathered Arpachshad, in the second year after the flood. **read ›**

38 **Genesis 11:13** After he fathered Cainan, Arpachshad lived four hundred years, and he fathered sons and daughters, and he died. Cainan lived a hundred and thirty years and fathered Shelah. After he fathered Shelah, Cainan lived three hundred and thirty years, and he fathered sons and daughters, and he died. **read ›**

39 **Genesis 11:17** After he fathered Peleg, Eber lived two hundred and seventy years, and he fathered sons and daughters, and he died. **read ›**

40 **Genesis 11:19** After he fathered Reu, Peleg lived two hundred and nine years, and he fathered sons and daughters, and he died. **read ›**

41 **Genesis 11:26** Terah lived seventy years and fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran. **read ›**

42 **Genesis 23:1** The life of Sarah was a hundred and twenty-seven years. **read ›**

43 **Genesis 25:7** These are the years of the days of Abraham’s life, as many as he lived: a hundred and seventy-five years. **read ›**

44 **Genesis 35:28** The days of Isaac that he lived were a hundred and eighty years. **read ›**

45 **Genesis 47:8** Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How many are the years of the days of your life?” **read ›**

46 **Genesis 47:9** And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my life, in which I live as a foreigner, are a hundred and thirty years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not reached the days of the years of my fathers’ lives, in the days when they lived as foreigners.” **read ›**

47 **Genesis 50:3** They completed forty days for him, for so are the days of burial counted; and Egypt mourned for him seventy days. **read ›**

48 **Exodus 7:7** Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron his brother was eighty-three years old, when he spoke to Pharaoh. **read ›**

49 **Leviticus 25:8** You shall count for yourself seven rests of years, seven times seven years; and the seven weeks of years shall be for you forty-nine years. **read ›**

50 **Deuteronomy 11:21** that your days may be long, and the days of your sons, on the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth. **read ›**

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51 **Deuteronomy 15:1** Every seven years you shall make a release. **read ›**

52 **Deuteronomy 31:2** and he said to them: I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I shall no longer be able to come in and go out. And the Lord has said to me, “You shall not cross this Jordan.” **read ›**

53 **Deuteronomy 34:7** Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eyes were not dimmed, nor had his cheeks wasted away. **read ›**

54 **Joshua 14:10** And now the Lord has kept me alive, as he said. This is the forty-fifth year since the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel journeyed in the wilderness; and now, behold, I am eighty-five years old today. **read ›**

55 **2 Samuel 19:35** I am eighty years old today. Can I still tell good from evil? Can your slave still taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I still hear the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your slave be a further burden to my lord the king? (Septuagint 2 Kingdoms 19:36 (2 Samuel 19:35 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

56 **2 Samuel 19:36** Your slave will go a little way across the Jordan with the king. Why should the king repay me with such a reward? (Septuagint 2 Kingdoms 19:37 (2 Samuel 19:36 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

57 **1 Chronicles 1:3** Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, **read ›**

58 **1 Chronicles 29:27** forty years: in Hebron seven years, and in Jerusalem thirty-three years. **read ›**

59 **Psalms 90:9** For all our days have failed, and in your anger we have failed; our years were spun out like a spider’s web. (Septuagint Psalm 89:9 (Psalm 90:9 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

60 **Psalms 90:10** The days of our years—in them are seventy years, and if in strength, eighty years, and the greater part of them is toil and trouble; for meekness came upon us, and we shall be disciplined. (Septuagint Psalm 89:10 (Psalm 90:10 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

61 **Proverbs 10:27** The fear of the Lord adds days, but the years of the ungodly will be shortened. **read ›**

62 **Isaiah 7:15** Butter and honey he shall eat, before he knows either to prefer evil or to choose the good. **read ›**

63 **Isaiah 23:15** And it will come to pass in that day that Tyre will be left seventy years, like the time of a king, like the time of a man; and after seventy years, Tyre will be like the song of a prostitute. **read ›**

64 **Isaiah 65:20** Nor will there ever again be one there who dies untimely, or an old man who does not fill out his time; for the young man will be a hundred years old, and the sinner who dies a hundred years old will also be cursed. **read ›**

65 **Ezekiel 14:1** And men from among the elders of the people of Israel came to me and sat before me. **read ›**

66 **Ezekiel 42:16** And he stood behind the gate facing east, and he measured five hundred with the measuring reed. **read ›**

67 **Daniel 3:2** And he sent to gather the high officials, the generals, the governors, leaders and princes, those in authority, and all the rulers of the districts, to come to the dedication of the image. **read ›**

68 **Hosea 6:3** Let us pursue knowing the Lord; we shall find him ready like the dawn, and he will come to us like the early and the latter rain to the earth.” **read ›**

69 **Amos 4:9** I struck you with burning and with blight; you multiplied your gardens, your vineyards, and your fig orchards, and the caterpillar devoured your olive groves; yet not even so did you return to me, says the Lord. **read ›**

70 **1 Esdras 1:58** until the land has enjoyed its Sabbaths; all the time of its desolation it shall keep Sabbath, until the completion of seventy years. **read ›**

71 **Tobit 14:11** And now, children, see what alms does, and how righteousness delivers.” And as he was saying these things, his soul left him on the bed; and he was a hundred and fifty-eight years old. And they buried him gloriously. **read ›**

72 **Wisdom of Solomon 4:9** but sound judgment is gray hair for men, and a spotless life is ripe old age. **read ›**

73 **Wisdom of Solomon 10:4** Because of him, when the earth was flooded, wisdom saved it again, steering the righteous man by a worthless piece of wood. **read ›**

74 **Wisdom of Sirach 14:17** All flesh grows old like a garment, for the covenant from of old is, ‘You shall die the death.’ **read ›**

75 **Wisdom of Sirach 18:9** The number of a man’s days, if many, is a hundred years. **read ›**

76 **Wisdom of Sirach 22:12** Mourning for the dead lasts seven days, but for a fool and an ungodly man, all the days of his life. **read ›**

77 **Wisdom of Sirach 37:25** The life of a man is in a number of days, but the days of Israel are without number. **read ›**

78 **Wisdom of Sirach 44:18** Everlasting covenants were made with him, that never should all flesh be blotted out by a flood. **read ›**

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79 **2 Maccabees 6:24** “For it is not worthy of our age to pretend,” he said, “so that many of the young would suppose that Eleazar, at ninety years of age, had gone over to a foreign way of life, **read ›**

80 **4 Maccabees 7:15** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

81 **1 Enoch 60:8** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

82 **1 Enoch 80:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

83 **1 Enoch 106:18** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

84 **1 Enoch 107:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

85 **Acts 23:15** Now therefore, you with the council inform the commanding officer that he should bring him down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to judge his case more exactly. We are ready to kill him before he comes near.” **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *26 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Exodus 33:20

Matthew 11:27 · 12:41 · 17:3 · 24:42

Luke 6:13 · 8:41 · 18:27

John 2:1 · 14:28 · 15:16

Acts 15:15 · 28:11

Romans 5:20 · 7:18

1 Corinthians 2:10 · 12:28 · 15:10

2 Corinthians 12:2 · 12:4

1 Timothy 1:4

2 Timothy 4:21

Titus 3:10

2 Peter 3:8

1 John 2:1

Revelation 20:2

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “When did God shorten the long lives people lived in Genesis?” on October 29, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY