

SCHEMATIZED OR NON-SCHEMATIZED: THE GENEALOGIES OF GENESIS 5 AND 11

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Even among evangelicals, it is now commonplace to understand the opening chapters of Genesis in the light of current scientific paradigms—specifically Darwinian evolution. Scholarly support for this understanding inevitably involves fresh exegetical approaches to Gen 1 and 2.¹ Often absent from the discussions is a consideration of the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11. Taken at face value, the numerical data associated with each generation in these two genealogies suggest a time scale for earth's history in terms of thousands rather than millions or billions of years. Such a brief time scale is hopelessly at odds not only with the widely-accepted evolutionary schema but also with historical and archaeological discoveries, such that the evident assertions of Gen 5 and 11 are little heeded in the scholarly literature.²

Yet the assertions are there, and responsible biblical exegesis is mandated by that simple fact. Where efforts are made to grapple with the material of these two chapters, attention is often focused on demonstrating that schematization of some kind has occurred, whether involving the number of names included in each of the two genealogies or the numerical data associated with those names. The implication, of course, is that schematized numbers are not natural numbers and schematized lists of names do not accurately represent the chronological facts of history: consequently, the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies cannot be used as part of a biblical chronology. For the most part, such approaches are admittedly not intended to prove Scripture to be in error

¹A great many books have been published on or around the subject. Among the more recent are Charles Halton, ed., *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither? Three Views on the Bible's Earliest Chapters* in Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015); Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday, eds., *Four Views on The Historical Adam* in Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013); J. Daryl Charles, *Reading Genesis 1–2: An Evangelical Conversation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013); John C. Lennox, *Seven Days That Divide the World: The Beginning According to Genesis and Science* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009); David G. Hagopian, *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux, 2001).

²Even a scholar such as C. John Collins, who is at least willing to accept the essential historicity of Adam and Eve, finds little reason to accord the early genealogies a second glance. Accepting without argument that the genealogy of Gen 5 (and 4) has gaps, he states that he knows of “no way to ascertain what size gaps these genealogies allow. . . . There is, therefore, good reason to steer away from the idea that Genesis 4–5 makes any kind of claim about the dates of the events and people involved.” See his *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 115.

so much as to provide support for the view that Scripture, rightly understood, need not be considered in conflict with science.³

Yet logical and exegetical difficulties with these revisionist approaches are not allayed by the sincerity that lies behind them. In two previous articles I have focused on the function of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies, noted the interrelationship of genealogy and narrative in Genesis, and attempted to tease out exegetical clues that support the integrity of the numerical data of those two genealogies.⁴ In the present paper I wish to focus more specifically on the outstanding issue of schematization. That the number of names and the numerical data associated with them appear to be non-random is a feature of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies that cannot be brushed aside. Suggestions that the data have been purposely manipulated, or even contrived, in order to create certain patterns need to be closely examined. The proposition that the numbers hide a purposeful numerical scheme needs to be put to the test. Here this will be done through one representative sexagesimal scheme, that suggested by Carol Hill: Does the scheme work—that is, is it able to account for the origin of the genealogical data—and can it be proved? There is, in addition, the issue of special numbers, and patterns in the presentation of names based on special numbers such as seven and ten. Does the presence of such numbers and patterns suggest purposeful schematization on the part of the human author? Do these argue for a written document that owes more to human scheme and imagination than to divine inspiration? Finally, is there evidence in the Bible to support the alternative proposition that the patterns of names and numbers in the genealogies might have been determined by providence rather than by human scheme?

Before approaching these specific questions, it will be necessary first to consider the general characteristics of schematization, then to review briefly the previous work of one eminent theologian whose pioneering efforts in this field should not be overlooked.

Schematization Defined

Whenever a set of facts or numbers is simplified for the sake of presentation, usually accomplished by paring the data or formularizing it, we may say that schematization has occurred. This simple schematization allows the presenter to quickly focus attention on the essential features or message of the data—or on features that the presenter wishes to highlight—and may be accomplished with minimal alteration to the original data. Rounding of numbers or

³Gerhard F. Hasel, while arguing that the names and numbers of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies are *not* schematized, nevertheless acknowledges that some of the suggested schemes do at least represent “serious attempts to find meaning in the figures. . . . The figures are not simply dismissed as meaningless” (“The Meaning of the Chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11,” *Origins* 7.2 [1980], 65; a similar comment is made in *ibid.*, 64).

⁴See White, “Revisiting Genesis 5 and 11: A Closer Look at the Chronogenealogies” *AUSS* 53.2 (2015): 253–277; “Adam to Joshua: Tracing A Paragenealogy,” *AUSS* 54.1 (2016): 3–29.

the selection and omission of nonessential material would fall under this definition. More complex schematization may seek to radically adjust or add to the original data in order to make them conform to a preconceived plan (or scheme). With respect to the biblical genealogies, purported sexagesimal systems or following a system of jubilee years would be examples of complex schematization. A scheme might involve working with existing material: shaping, editing, and arranging it so that it conforms to a preordained scheme. But it does not necessarily involve working with a prior text; there is the possibility that a scheme, and the material it uses, is an original, fictional work, perhaps based loosely on historical material.

Schematization and Pattern

Because of human nature's fondness for order and structure, schematization often results in a patterned arrangement of the material that is both visually and audibly pleasing and at the same time easier to remember. Schematization and pattern, however, are not the same. The first may very often result in the second, but there is no logical requirement to insist that the second is necessarily the result of the first.

In nature, for example, patterns can be produced by random forces, wind-blown patterns in the sand on a beach being but one example.⁵ In literature, patterns are much less likely to be the result of chance since literature, in contrast to the random forces of nature, proceeds from an intelligent mind acting with artistic design and teleological intent. When it comes to the literary genre of historical narrative, the presence of patterns in the literature are likely to raise suspicions of schematization for the simple reason that historical events—at least in their minutiae—tend not to occur in patterns. When, therefore, it is observed that the Bible records just ten generations from Adam to Noah (Gen 5) and exactly ten more from Noah's son Shem to Abram (Gen 11); that the terminal generation in both of these genealogies has three siblings; that the age data supplied for each generation appear strikingly nonrandom; that the age data of Shem mirror (in a sense) the age data of Noah; and that rather special-looking numbers such as 365, 777, and 500 are attached to significant figures such as Enoch, Lamech and Noah—when these facts are observed, the question does arise as to whether these nominal and numerical data might in fact be artificial or contrived.⁶

⁵Snowflakes, in their seemingly infinite variety (and beauty), are another. It has been determined that these patterns are the product of physical forces acting randomly. This fact, however, does not automatically exclude God's role in their production. Why might not the Creator have established such forces that would, under certain conditions, continually generate unique (and beautiful) patterns?

⁶These observations pertaining to apparent schematization, as well as additional material outlined by Laurence Turner (see n. 42, below), are not new. William Henry Green, in the late nineteenth century, seems to have been the first to posit gaps in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies as a way of harmonizing them with the evidence for much larger time scales ("Primeval Chronology," *BSac* 47 [April 1890]: 285–303). His argument was based in part upon the "regularity" of the lists: "The structure of

But first impressions must not be allowed to evolve unexamined into dogma. On the one hand, what might at first appear to be a simple pattern may turn out to be otherwise. On the other hand, purported schemes intended to account for the patterns may prove to be deficient in their explanatory power. Importantly, we must remember that it is the word of God that we are handling. It is not just that Scripture is an inspired record of a religious history; it is that Scripture is a record of God's acts and words in a particular history. At a minimum, this must mean that historical events are not always as random as we might imagine. It may even be that some patterns of names and numbers in the historical record came about in the first place by the guiding hand of divine providence. Unless one denies that God is active in human affairs, the possibility of God's involvement is not something that can legitimately be excluded *a priori*; that possibility certainly should be, and here will be, given some consideration.

Schematization and the Earlier Work of Gerhard F. Hasel

It is several decades since OT scholar Gerhard F. Hasel explored the question of supposed schematization (or systematization) in the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11.⁷ Hasel's focus was essentially twofold. His first concern was with the textual history of the various ancient texts—specifically the Masoretic Text (MT), the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP), and the Septuagint (LXX). Hasel's comparative analysis of these texts led him to conclude that the SP and (especially) the LXX in their various recensions show strong evidence of schematization; they stand in marked contrast to the MT. To Hasel, this suggests that the MT ought to be given priority over the other texts. This is because textual emendation is more likely to move in the direction of irregularity to regularity, schematization, and pattern than to purposely create irregularity where previously there was pattern. His conclusion bears repeating: "If it is possible to convince oneself that the purpose of the MT is to bring irregularity and non-system out of regularity, schematization and

the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 . . . favors the belief that they do not register all the names in these respective lines of descent. Their regularity seems to indicate intentional arrangement" (ibid., 302). He states further that "it seems in the highest degree probable that the symmetry of these primitive genealogies is artificial rather than natural. It is much more likely that this definite number of names fitting into a regular scheme has been selected as sufficiently representing the periods to which they belong, than that all these striking numerical coincidences should have happened to occur in these successive instances" (ibid.).

⁷See Hasel "Genesis 5 and 11: Chronogenealogies in the Biblical History of Beginnings," *Origins* 7.1 (1980): 23–37; idem, "The Meaning of the Chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11," 53–70 (see n. 3, above). Travis R. Freeman is another theologian who has questioned the common assumption of schematization. See his "The Genesis 5 and 11 Fluidity Question," *Tyndale Journal* 19.2 (2005): 83–90. Freeman nevertheless deals only briefly with the narrower question of schematization (ibid., 86–88).

system, then both the LXX and the Samaritan Pentateuch may be conceived to have priority over the Hebrew text.”⁸

Although, as Hasel admits, one cannot claim with certainty that the MT has priority, the evidence does point in that direction. Yet even if the priority of the MT is accepted, it would be a mistake to suggest that the MT itself shows no evidence of schematization. There, in the most widely read OT text, one may readily find pattern, the use of special numbers (the “sevens,” both overt and hidden), and what appear to be rounded numbers. These phenomena, too, need to be addressed.

In a second article, Hasel explored the meaning of the numbers. Among other things, this led to an analysis of various scholarly efforts that had attempted to demonstrate that the genealogical data were highly schematized. His conclusion was that “the disparity between the various systems has not recommended them to many scholars.”⁹ Perhaps so. But that some degree of schematization is a characteristic of the genealogies seems still to be a common assumption. This is not surprising, given that both the nominal and numerical data in these lists certainly appear to contain patterns and nonrandom numbers, raising the legitimate suspicion of schematization. Furthermore, despite Hasel’s fairly rigorous critique of purported numerical systems, the idea that the biblical writer did indeed employ some form of system continues to be promoted. One of these—a sexagesimal system suggested by Carol Hill—will be appraised here in some detail. Additionally, other commonly recognized indications of schematization of names and numbers will be explored.

It is not necessary here either to assume Hasel’s findings or to attempt to confirm or refute them. In the first place, my intention is to work simply with the MT, being that with which most readers are familiar. If, as Hasel finds, the MT shows less evidence of schematization than either the SP or the LXX, there is still in the MT sufficient grounds for claiming schematization

⁸Hasel, “Genesis 5 and 11,” 36. W. H. Green, though strongly denying that the Genesis genealogies have any chronological value, and setting forth many of the now-familiar arguments of schematization and compression, nevertheless accepted without debate the priority of the MT (Green, “Primeval Chronology,” 300–302). A contrasting position is taken by Robert M. Best, who argues on the basis of age ratios. Specifically, the ratio between age at begetting and age at death is today usually between 4 and 6. So a young man having a first child at age twenty and subsequently dying at age eighty demonstrates a ratio of 4. Begetting a first child at age eighteen and finally expiring at the ripe old age of 108 demonstrates a ratio of 6. The genealogical data as found in the LXX produce ratios consistent with those of today, while the figures found in the MT and SP produce ratios of up to 13.77. Clearly, according to Best, such ratios are not possible. See his *Noah’s Ark and the Ziusudra Epic: Sumerian Origins of the Flood Myth* (Fort Myers, FL: Enlil Press, 1999), 106–107. Obviously, Best does not consider the possibility that lifespans in the early years of earth’s history might have been considerably longer than those of today, allowing for much larger ratios.

⁹Hasel, “Meaning of the Chronogenealogies,” 65.

and sufficient material with which to explore that charge.¹⁰ Additionally, the arguments offered here may be seen as complementary to those penned by Hasel, less because they take his arguments further than that they broach aspects of the subject that he did not explore in detail.

The Question of a Ten-Ten Pattern of Names in Gen 5 and 11

A symmetrical ten-ten pattern of the names in the antediluvian-postdiluvian genealogical lists is accepted without demur by most scholars.¹¹ Few have questioned this general assumption.¹² Those who have questioned it have pointed out that, while there certainly are ten names from Adam to Noah and ten more from Shem to Abram, the actual genealogical lists, when viewed together, do not present a ten-ten pattern. The Gen 5 genealogy actually ends not with Noah, but with his three sons, making eleven generations in total. The Gen 11 genealogy also ends with three sons, among whom Abram is one,

¹⁰That systematization of the genealogical data did occur at some point in Israel's history can hardly be doubted. Variations between the OT texts is particularly evident in the numerical data and may in many cases indicate attempts to systematize the figures to conform to a preconceived scheme. But there is a need to think carefully about how to interpret this obvious phenomenon. Two questions, especially, must be considered: (1) Was the *original* text the product of such a scheme, or did it contain real numbers that were later schematized? (2) Does any pattern in the names or numbers automatically indicate fabrication or systematization?

¹¹Examples abound: "Each genealogy presented in chapters 5 and 11 of Genesis includes ten names. Adam to Noah contains ten names and Shem to Abraham contains ten names. To break a text into a ten-generational pattern was common for many Near Eastern people-groups of that time" (Carol A. Hill, "Making Sense of the Numbers of Genesis," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 55.4 [2003]: 246); "There are ten generations from Adam through Noah . . . and ten more from Shem through Abraham" (E. H. Merrill, "Chronology," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003], 118–119); "The ten generations from Adam to Noah are paralleled by a like number separating Noah from Adam" (N. M. Sarna, "Genesis, Book of," *EncJud* 7:397); "The genealogies between Adam and Noah, and Noah and Abraham, are each set up to contain ten members, with the last having three sons" (John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000], 35). In addition to the aspect of symmetry when comparing the two lists of names, the mere fact that Noah is tenth is itself seen by some to indicate artificiality. Dwight Young, for example, notes that "[Noah] is also tenth in the line of antediluvian Patriarchs. This tradition is doubtless dependent upon a Mesopotamian source. It is especially reminiscent of a notation in the writings of Berossus (third century BCE), according to which the hero of the great flood was Babylonia's tenth antediluvian king" (Young, "Noah," *EncJud* 15:287).

¹²Travis R. Freeman, citing S. R. Külling, notes that most scholars seem to have "overlooked" the fact that the genealogies are not really symmetrical (Freeman, "A New Look at the Genesis 5 and 11 Fluidity Problem," *AUSS* 42.2 [2004]: 273). Hasel had already pointed out that there was "no schematic ten-ten sequence" in his "Meaning of the Chronogenealogies," 60.

but the total number of generations is only ten (in the MT).¹³ The following table allows one to see this at a glance:

(7th)		Enoch			Serug	
(8th)		Methuselah			Nahor	
(9th)		Lamech			Terah	
(10th)		Noah		Abram	Nahor	Haran
(11th)	Shem	Ham	Japheth		—	

If one were to insist that the first antediluvian genealogy should be considered to end with Noah, the last father, making only ten generations, one would have to do similarly with the genealogy of Gen 11. In that case the second genealogy would have only nine generations and would end not with Abram, but with Terah, the last father in the list. It is either an eleven-ten pattern or a ten-nine pattern, which amounts, in either case, to an undeniable asymmetry.¹⁴

The observation that a neat ten-ten pattern does not survive even moderate scrutiny appears, initially, to be correct. But to conclude from this that there is no pattern, or scheme, would be incorrect. As I have demonstrated in a previous article, what needs to be recognized is that there is a system of patterns functioning on three levels.¹⁵ By re-presenting the above table, the three-fold pattern is clearly apparent.

¹³Some recensions of the LXX have an additional name (Cainan, between Shelah and Arphaxad; cf. Lk 3:36), resulting in a symmetrical list of ten names. The tenth in both cases is the father of three sons. In this case, however, Abram can in no sense be considered parallel with Noah; see the discussion that follows (main text). I am indebted to Rodger C. Young for the following additional comment: "Cainan as a son of Arphaxad, however, is not found in the oldest extant MS that contains Luke 3:36, the Bodmer Papyrus P⁷⁵, nor is this name in the Samaritan Pentateuch or Josephus. Possibly later editors of the LXX added the name in order to achieve a (false) harmony, making eleven generations from Noah to Abraham to compare with the eleven generations from Adam to Noah. Scribes copying the NT, who were generally familiar with the LXX but who did not read Hebrew, would have 'corrected' Luke's supposed omission to be in harmony with the artificial schematization of the LXX" (Rodger C. Young, personal correspondence with the author, 13 July 2016).

¹⁴It is unlikely that any scholar working in this field today is unaware of this asymmetry. But the fact is often glossed over in order to promote the ten-ten scheme. Carol Hill, having noted that there are just ten names from Adam to Noah and ten more from Shem to Abraham (see n. 11 above), states that "in addition, the description of each of these ten generations ends with a father having three sons" ("Making Sense," 246). Technically, this is correct. But one may observe the careful wording that allows the writer to state what is true while, unfortunately, giving the impression of something that is *not* true: that the two genealogies have a happy symmetry in their presentation of these ten generations. The simple fact is, they do not. A similar observation can be made about the statement of Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas (see n. 11, above).

¹⁵Compare White, "Revisiting Genesis 5 and 11," 269n42.

First Parallel

(7th)		Enoch		Serug	
(8th)		Methuselah		Nahor	
(9th)		Lamech		Terah	
(10th)		Noah	Abram	Nahor	Haran
(11th)	Shem	Ham	Japheth	—	

Second Parallel

(7th)		Enoch		Serug	
(8th)		Methuselah		Nahor	
(9th)		Lamech		Terah	
(10th)		Noah	Abram	Nahor	Haran
(11th)	Shem	Ham	Japheth	—	

Third Parallel

(7th)		Enoch		Serug	
(8th)		Methuselah		Nahor	
(9th)		Lamech		Terah	
(10th)		Noah	<i>Abram</i>	<i>Nahor</i>	<i>Haran</i>
(11th)	<i>Shem</i>	<i>Ham</i>	<i>Japheth</i>	—	

In the first place, Noah and Abram are parallel. They are the tenth, and most important, figures in their respective lines. Abram is also parallel with Shem: they both are one of the three sons with whom each genealogy formally ends; in each case they are mentioned first, although it is by no means certain that they were actually the firstborn sons;¹⁶ and they both are the figures through whom the godly line is continued. Third, as the final fathers in their respective lists, Noah and Terah, too, are parallel figures.

Each of the three parallels serves a particular end. The first presents two seminal figures in salvation history. With Noah, the old world ended; with Abram, the nation of Israel began. Through the Flood, God purges his people by removing the wicked from among them. With Abram, God purges his people by removing them from the wicked. Thus, the first parallel bespeaks God's work in preserving a godly line upon the earth. The second and third parallels both serve as literary features that connect and unify the genealogical and narrative material of Genesis.¹⁷ For the genealogy of Gen 5 is interrupted

¹⁶There is some room for difference of opinion on this point. The position taken here is that, if Shem was one hundred years old "two years after the flood" (Gen 11:10), he must have been born when Noah was 502 years old, making him probably the second son (cf. Gen 5:32; 7:6, 11). Similarly, if Abram was seventy-five years old at the death of his father, the latter must have been 130 years old when Abram was born (cf. Gen 11:26, 31–32; 12:4; Acts 7:4). It is not a vital point. What can be stated is that in both cases—Noah's sons and Terah's sons—there is some ambiguity.

¹⁷The narrative material relating to Noah and Abraham is largely concerned with God's work to establish on the earth a people who "call upon the name of the LORD." The genealogical material exhibits a similar concern, and does so on two fronts. First, it bears witness to the fact that there has been no generation since Adam in which God

by the Flood narrative, in which Noah is the main figure. But following this lengthy interlude (Gen 6:1–11:9), the genealogy continues, relaunched by Noah's son Shem. This second phase of the genealogy is similarly interrupted, this time by a shorter interlude (Gen 11:27–32). In this interlude, it is again the final father of the genealogy, Terah, who is the main figure. Once more, it is the first-mentioned son, Abram, who then relaunches the genealogy. But the genealogy now slows down to allow time for much more detail: it has become a narrative.¹⁸ Again, a diagram will make more apparent the connection between these second and third parallels (Shem/Abram and Noah/Terah) and their particular function in the interplay of narrative and genealogy:

<i>Noah</i>	Shem	Interlude I (<i>Noah</i>)	Shem
(chronology/genealogy continues from Shem in GENEALOGY form)			
<i>Terah</i>	Abram	Interlude II (<i>Terah</i>)	Abram
(chronology/genealogy continues from Abram in NARRATIVE form)			

The point of this is that there clearly is a patterned arrangement in the names that appear in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies. The total number of generations, the existence and grouping of the three sons born to the final fathers, and the resulting threefold parallel form a complex pattern that is unlikely to be accidental or coincidental. Especially, the theological and literary connections engendered by the presence and placement of the names are integral to the overall meaning of the story at this point. This suggests purpose and design.

But are we to conclude from this that the data have been “fiddled” with—that the writer perhaps selected from a larger list the nine or ten names he wanted to include in each of the two genealogies, and that, however many sons Noah and Terah might really have had, the writer selected just three in

has not had such a people to uphold his name. The purpose of the tightly overlapping numerical data of the genealogies is not simply to establish the fact of immediate biological succession from generation to generation *for its own sake*. It is that God may be glorified in demonstrating his ability to maintain a people on the earth *in every generation* despite the prevailing wickedness. That is why the genealogy slows down with Noah to become a narrative: what God has been doing in every generation is exemplified and brought to its apotheosis in the story of Noah. The theme of the narrative is not disconnected from the theme of the genealogy out of which it grows and to which it belongs. A second way in which the genealogical material is concerned with God's work to establish and maintain the godly line is through the chronological emphasis evident in the all-pervading numerical data. Once again, those data are not there for their own sake—not primarily as data by which to calculate the age of the earth—but as witness to the fact that God's program in salvation history would proceed according to God's timetable (on which, there is more below in the section on “God's Providence in the Numbers”). This interrelationship—the essential oneness—between narrative and genealogical concerns is reinforced by the system of parallels noted here.

¹⁸See White, “Adam to Joshua,” 4–5.

each case? On this question, it will be helpful to consider the three sons born to both Noah and Terah.

The Three Sons in the Final Generation of Each Genealogy

The details found in the flood narrative (the first interlude) emphasize that Noah had just three sons who entered with him into the ark. The same three then propagated the various races that repopulated the earth after the flood.¹⁹ And what of Terah's family? It is possible to imagine that the father of Abram had more than three sons, the extra names not being supplied by the biblical writer. But it is far from likely. The impression given from the second interlude (Gen 11:27–32) is that of a fairly comprehensive listing of family members known to the writer. Why else the mention of Haran's son Iscah (v. 29), who plays no role in this or any subsequent narrative? It would appear that his name is included only for the sake of completeness. In any case, in a pericope that is evidently given for the specific purpose of providing details of Terah's immediate family, it is hard to see why the biblical writer would have failed to name all of the patriarch's immediate children.²⁰

It is, then, a very reasonable conclusion that the three sons named at the conclusion of the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 are not contrived in order to present a scheme. It simply happens to be that both Noah and Terah had three sons each.²¹ Coincidences do happen, and the existence of a pattern does not demand the conclusion that schematization has occurred.²² This needs to

¹⁹Compare also 1 Pet 3:20, which has only eight individuals saved in the Flood.

²⁰Additional, circumstantial evidence for the completeness of the biblical record regarding Terah's sons is found in two subsequent accounts that seem to recognize no other siblings of Abram besides Haran and Nahor. When it was time to find a wife for Isaac, Abraham instructed his servant, "Go to my country and to my family" (Gen 24:4, NKJV). The servant consequently headed for Nahor's home (Gen 24:10), giving no indication that he had any other options besides this one relative. And when Jacob, fleeing from his brother Esau, arrived in the same land and encountered a group of shepherds from Haran, he asked only, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" (Gen 29:5). Again, no other family line is recognized or enquired after.

²¹This is not to say that Noah might not have had other sons either prior to, or following, his entering the ark. It is conceivable that he had older sons who went the way of the wicked, refusing to enter the ark. Were that the case, it does not change the fact that *only three* sons were saved from the pre-flood world and repopulated the post-flood world.

²²Hill, who argues for schematization in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies, acknowledges that "this is not to say that Noah or Terah or Cain [who is also recorded as having three sons] did not have three (or more) sons, or that these sons were not real historical people. It is to say that the biblical writer mentioned only these sons so that the text was made numerically symmetrical and harmonious within the overall framework of religious intent" ("Making Sense," 246). This is inadequate. The text portrays that Noah had only three sons who went with him into the ark and from whom the earth was repopulated. They were not selected for mention by the writer in order to introduce symmetry. To the contrary, their inclusion in the genealogy, as will be subsequently explained here, introduces asymmetry.

be kept in mind when we later consider the numerical data of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies.

Another question arises, however. Why did the writer decide to include the two sets of siblings in the genealogies in the first place? For doing so profoundly disturbs the ten-ten pattern that would otherwise have existed. That is: logically, the genealogies should have ended simply with Noah on the one hand, and with Abram on the other, thus:

(7th)	Enoch	Serug
(8th)	Methuselah	Nahor
(9th)	Lamech	Terah
(10th)	Noah	Abram

That is symmetry! If symmetry and a ten-ten pattern had been the writer's schematic aim, he had all he needed with these names. Yet he chooses to disturb this striking balance by adding an extra generation to the first genealogy, creating a lopsidedness that is not diminished by the corresponding inclusion of siblings in Abram's generation (one generation earlier). So why? If, as many seem to believe, the writer had from a larger list selected just ten names for the generations from Adam to Noah and ten more for Shem to Abram, why would he then spoil his own scheme by creating a lopsided list? Strictly speaking, the extra siblings are not even part of the godly line and therefore do not belong in the genealogies. If schematization were the aim, the writer would surely not have wanted to include them. All that needed to be said about them is found in the narrative interludes (Gen 6–10; 11:27–32), making redundant their misplaced appearance in the genealogies. Again, if schematization were the aim, and if contriving names were acceptable, the writer might easily have selected (or invented) two siblings for Noah's generation. He would then have achieved a perfectly symmetrical pair of genealogies, thus:

(7th)		Enoch			Serug	
(8th)		Methuselah			Nahor	
(9th)		Lamech			Terah	
(10th)	Noah	[Sibling]	[Sibling]	Abram	Nahor	Haran

None of this proves that the biblical writer did not omit names from these genealogies. But the suggestion that artful schematization is implied by the existence of a ten-ten pattern is, on closer examination, seen to be poorly conceived. There are patterns, to be sure—and more complex than the simple ten-ten pattern that most have supposed—but they do not show evidence of having been constructed either by the falsification of names or by the omission of any.

Nevertheless, the complex of patterns does appear purposeful in that it serves a theological end. If schematization of names is rejected, one may conclude either (1) that the writer of Genesis discovered the inherent patterns and realized how they could be arranged to serve a theological purpose, or (2) that it was the divine Author who conceived the arrangement, with its

theological purpose, and inspired the biblical writer to include the names that he did, the human author possibly being unaware of the divine purpose. The second of these suggestions carries with it the implication that the number of generations from Adam to Noah and from Shem to Abram was exactly ten by God's providence; and so, too, the number of children born to Noah and Terah. This possibility will be considered at a later point in this article.²³

The issue of schematization of names is, however, complicated by the character of the numerical data connected with these same names. The patterns evident in this second set of data again raises suspicion of schematization. And if the numerical data are schematized, it becomes more awkward to insist that the names themselves are not. It is to the numerical data that we now turn.

Questioning Schematization of Numbers in Gen 5 and 11

In connection with the schematization question, the numbers in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies present us with slightly different problems. One relates to their apparent nonrandomness, a second to the possible use of some form of numerical system, and a third to the astonishing presence of special-looking numbers such as 777 and 365. They will be considered here in that order.

The Issue of Nonrandomness

No argument is required to establish that the numerical data of Gen 5 and 11 display some degree of nonrandomness. Of the forty numbers for the pregenerative and postgenerative years of both lists, the last digit of nineteen of these is 0, while a further eight have 5 as the final digit. Digits 1, 6, and 8 are not represented at all. The remaining five possible digits are represented only thirteen times in total. Even though the sample is small, it seems extremely unlikely that just two out of the ten possible final digits would account for 67.5 percent (27 out of 40) of the total sample.

There are three possible reasons why any individual number might end in zero: (1) it is a natural number;²⁴ (2) it is a natural number that has been rounded; or (3) it is an artificial number. In respect to the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies as a whole, the first of these options can, with a fair degree of certainty, be dismissed on statistical grounds. The question then becomes: Are the pregenerative and postgenerative numbers natural numbers, some of which have been rounded, or are they artificial numbers where final digit zeros and fives were frequently selected in order to conform to a scheme? Walter Makous applies various statistical tools to the task of determining whether or not the numbers in these genealogies are artificial. He concludes that "all efforts to show that the numbers lack the properties of natural numbers failed; therefore,

²³See the several consecutive sections below beginning with "God and Preferred Numbers."

²⁴Hill, whose sexagesimal system will be analyzed below, refers to natural numbers as "real" numbers (Hill, "Making Sense," 239, 245).

one cannot reject the hypothesis that the numbers have a natural origin. This, of course, does not prove a natural origin; it simply fails to disprove it."²⁵

While Makous believes his analysis shows that some numbers definitely have been rounded (a necessary conclusion if the numbers are not regarded as artificial), he adds that "one cannot say with confidence that any specific number has been rounded."²⁶ This suggests an interesting question, however. For even if it is clear that some numbers have been rounded, it is equally clear that many have not (namely, those thirteen numbers whose final digits are something other than 0 or 5). Why, then, would some numbers be rounded and not others? We have no idea, of course, at which point in the transmission process rounding might have occurred. It may in some instances have occurred at the very earliest point, due possibly to a natural or cultural preference for using particular digits when referring to age.²⁷ Or, during the long period of oral transmission, some numbers might have been rounded to make them easier to memorize. Other scenarios are possible.

The point is, we not only cannot be sure which numbers have been rounded; we also cannot know who rounded them. We cannot know if the individuals themselves recorded their own age when they gave birth to a particular son and recalled that age as a rounded number; whether a subsequent generation recalled the approximate age at which their father or grandfather begot a particular child; or whether the biblical writer chose to round some of the numbers. In short, our ignorance of how and when these numbers might have been rounded is total.

Regardless of who might have rounded some numbers and why they might have done so, the very fact that a disproportionate number seem to be rounded means that, taken as a whole, the numbers appear to be nonrandom and nonnatural. This fact makes it more difficult to arbitrate as to whether the numbers are real or artificial; for, as Makous notes, rounding "invalidates the computation of probabilities based on the assumption that the final digits of these numbers are random."²⁸

²⁵Walter Makous, "Biblical Longevities: Empirical Data or Fabricated Numbers?" *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 63.3 (2011): 124. Makous's interpretation of the statistical data was challenged by Donald A. Huebner in "Biblical Longevities: Some Questions and Issues," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 63.4 (2011): 287–288. Makous responded in "Biblical Longevities: Reply to Huebner," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 64.2 (2012): 143.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 123.

²⁷In one statistical study, James L. Hayward and Donald E. Casebolt present the suggestion, as one of several options to account for the randomness of the numbers in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies, that "the biased age values may be due to digit preferences by those reporting age data." The authors cite one demographic study of reported age data from the Philippines in the year 1960. The data reveal a "strong preference for ages ending in '0,' with somewhat lesser preferences for ages ending in '5,' '2,' and '8.'" James L. Hayward and Donald E. Casebolt, "The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11: A Statistical Study," *Origins* 9.2 (1982): 80.

²⁸Makous, "Biblical Longevities," 123.

Still considering the pregenerative and postgenerative ages, of the twenty numbers for the Gen 5 group, fifteen have 0 or 5 as the last digit; of the twenty numbers for the Gen 11 group, only twelve do. The imbalance is not suggestive of artificiality or of schematization. On the presumption of artificiality, is it possible to explain why the biblical writer selected some names to carry the 0 or 5 digit, but not others? Why, for instance, did Cainan (70/840) and Mahalaleel (65/830) receive two rounded numbers, while Methuselah (187/782), distinguished above others on account of his superior longevity, received none? Why did Serug (30/200) receive two nicely rounded numbers, while his father Reu (32/207) and son Nahor (29/119) received none at all? There may be a reason why, but it is not apparent, and there seems no way of knowing it. And if the reason is inherently unknowable to the reader, why would the writer have contrived it?

The issue becomes irrelevant, however, if it is asserted that no rounding of real numbers has occurred. Instead—our third option that is mentioned above—the numbers are entirely artificial, created to form a scheme. Carol Hill is one who has strongly proposed such a scheme. It will here be considered in some detail, as representative of similar schemes.

Considerations of a Numerological Scheme

For Hill, the numbers in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies have a numerological purpose.²⁹ She believes the key to understanding these numbers is to see that the numerical data are based on both sacred numbers and preferred numbers. Sacred numbers, she claims, are obtained from the Mesopotamian sexagesimal system. Of these the most important is sixty, along with seven and, to a lesser degree, ten.³⁰ These numbers were particularly associated with mathematics

²⁹Hill is simply one of a number of scholars who suggest a numerical scheme of one kind or another. As pointed out by P. G. Nelson, Hill appears to be following Umberto Cassuto in the idea that contemporary numerology lay behind the numerical data of Gen 5 and 11 (Nelson, "Numerology in Genesis," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 60.1 [March 2008]: 70.) Several numerological schemes have been analyzed by Hasel, as noted above. Evangelical scholar, John H. Walton, has cautiously posited the idea that when the *total* of the individual lifespans for the patriarchs of Gen 5 is converted to a sexagesimal number, it results in a figure similar to the total of the regnal lengths of one version of the Sumerian King List (SKL); see Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989). Walton is able to achieve this by discounting both Adam and Noah (arguing that they have no parallel in the SKL), so that the remaining eight names in Gen 5 can be paralleled with the eight names from one particular version of the SKL. Additionally, the total of the Genesis names (6,695) is rounded (to 6,700) before converting it to the sexagesimal number. From the result, Walton concludes that "the two lists share a common link somewhere in their heritage" and that "if such a relationship exists, the Genesis 5 lists would be earlier" (*ibid.*, 129). He admits that this "still gives no explanation for the variations between individuals, numbers, or the variations between the names" (*ibid.*, 130).

³⁰Hill, "Making Sense," 242.

and astronomy, and with texts relating to the affairs of “gods, kings, or persons of high standing.”³¹ In addition, “sacred numbers also fit into the Mesopotamians’ world view of symmetry and harmony It was important to associate one’s life with the right numbers Symbolic numbers were of highest value in religious texts because they were considered to be the carriers of ultimate truth and reality.”³² To be considered alongside these, in Hill’s schema, are the biblical preferred numbers, especially three, seven, twelve, and forty.

Using both Mesopotamian sacred numbers and biblical preferred numbers, Hill produces a table showing that each of the sixty numbers from the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 are the sum of these two types of numbers.³³ On examining the table, one is able to see that Hill has employed the numbers two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight(!), ten, fifteen(!), forty, and sixty—eleven numbers in all—in various combinations of multiplication, addition and subtraction. Let us extract two examples, those of Adam and Methuselah. I choose these two simply because of their mutual dissimilarity: all three of Adam’s numbers as given in the biblical text end in zero, while none of Methuselah’s three numbers end in either zero or five. Associated with each name is a pregenerative number, a postgenerative number, and an age at death. Thus:

Adam:	130 = (60 x 2 yrs) + (60 x 2 mos)
	800 = (60 x 10 x 10 mos) + (60 x 60 mos)
	930 = (60 x 3 x 5 yrs) x 60mos + (6 x 5 yrs) x (60mos)
Methuselah:	187 = (60 x 3 yrs) + 7 yrs
	782 = (60 x 10 x 10 mos) + (60 x 60 mos) - (6 x 3 yrs)
	969 = (60 + 60 + 60 + 6 + 6) x 60 mos - 5 yrs (60 mos) + 7 yrs + 7 yrs

Regardless of the terminal digit, each number can be seen as the sum of various combinations of sacred and preferred numbers. Hill clearly expects readers to be impressed with these results. Yet having at her disposal no fewer than eleven numbers to manipulate, the suspicion does arise that any number can be made to yield to such calculations. One may suspect, too, that any other numerical scheme would “work” as well.³⁴ A brief experiment will serve to confirm these suspicions.

³¹Ibid., 241.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., 245. Hill includes not only the forty pregenerative and postgenerative numbers from both genealogies, but the age-at-death figures that are supplied in Gen 5 and implied in the second genealogy.

³⁴Nelson, while not analyzing Hill’s scheme in detail, did nevertheless offer the observation that the formula Hill used to reproduce the age data associated with Nahor can be used (in its multiples) to reproduce any age (Nelson, “Numerology in Genesis,” 70). I here offer a more extensive analysis of Hill’s sexagesimal scheme.

Let us, for the sake of illustration, reject the Mesopotamian connection and imagine that the biblical author employed only the biblical preferred numbers—three, seven, twelve, and forty—which, in addition, can be doubled (the number two) or multiplied by ten. Using only six numbers, this is a markedly more restrictive system than the one employed by Hill. Despite this restriction, the system of “preferred numbers only” yields the following:

Adam:	130 = 7 x 2 x 10 yrs - 12 yrs + 2 yrs (2 x 12 mos)
	800 = 70 x 12 yrs - 40 yrs
	930 = 40 x 12 x 2 yrs - 70 yrs + 40 yrs
Methuselah:	187 = 12 x 12 yrs + 40 yrs + 3 yrs
	782 = 40 x 2 x 10 yrs - 7 x 3 yrs + 3 yrs
	969 = 40 x 12 x 2 yrs + 12 yrs - 3 yrs

With results so easily possible using only the biblical preferred numbers, one might wonder why a Jew would eschew using a purely “Jewish” numerical system in favor of a mongrel Jewish-Mesopotamian system (as in Hill’s scheme). If the purpose of the Genesis 5 and 11 genealogies has anything to do with presenting the line of God’s people, culminating in the Jewish race, the purposeful neglect of a purely Jewish numerical system is baffling.

Regardless of this mystery, we are forced by these calculations to an important conclusion: the fact that all the numbers can be fitted into a sexagesimal system does not prove that they are the product of that system. It can be decisively shown they can just as easily be fitted into a competing system. Crucially, not only does Hill’s system not constitute proof that the biblical writer/editor employed such a scheme as Hill imagines, but it cannot even constitute evidence of schematization. For if the genealogical numbers can, at the will of the interpreter, be made to fit virtually any numerical scheme, it follows that no one of those schemes points the evidence in any one direction. If the genealogical numbers were indeed contrived as part of a numerological scheme, the evidence for that would have to be built on a basis entirely different from the one that Hill has presented. And even if evidence of a numerological scheme were to be found, and found on such a basis, one would still have to prove that the biblical writer had one particular scheme in mind and not another.

The deficiency of such a scheme can be exposed from another angle, and via a question: Is Hill suggesting that the formulas she describes were the precise formulas that the Bible writer had in mind? In truth, this cannot be known, for the simple reason that different formulas, using the same set of numbers as Hill employs, can produce the same totals. Here, again, is Hill’s suggestion for 930 (Adam’s age at death): $930 = 60 \times 3 \times 5 \text{ yrs (60 mos)} + 6 \times 5 \text{ yrs (60 mos)}$. But the total of 930 can also be produced as $930 = 60 \times 4 \times 4 \text{ yrs} - 6 \times 5 \text{ yrs (60 mos)}$ or as $930 = 60 \times 10 \text{ yrs} + 60 \times 5 \text{ yrs (60 mos)} + 6 \times 5 \text{ yrs (60 mos)}$. Clearly, then, Hill has achieved no more than to demonstrate her own mathematical abilities. Her calculations provide no insight at all into what formulas the biblical author might have had in mind—or, indeed, as to whether he had any formulas in mind at all.

That more than one formula can produce the same total suggests another questionable element in Hill's scheme—and in any other similar scheme: What do the formulas individually mean? That is, what is the meaning of, say, "60 x 3 x 5 yrs (60 mos) + 6 x 5 yrs (60 mos)" over and against "(60 + 60 + 60 + 6 + 6) x 60 mos - 5 yrs (60 mos) + 7 yrs + 7 yrs"?³⁵ Why might the writer have chosen these particular combinations? And if the ages are artificial, were those ages chosen before the formulas, or vice versa? Let us try to imagine the process by which the biblical writer contrived these supposedly artificial numbers.

The writer has before him a name that he wishes to include in his genealogy; let us say, Methuselah. Whatever age Methuselah really lived to—whether to his 90s or 900s—the biblical writer wishes to associate with Methuselah an age that is in harmony with Mesopotamian sacred numbers.³⁶ Does the writer first choose a desired age number—one that ends in a zero or a five, or which hides some other attraction—and then find a formula to match it? In that case, the formula is secondary to the age number and probably has no special meaning in itself. Or does the writer begin by choosing (or constructing) a formula with no particular age datum in mind? This is surely not the case, since beginning with a formula will result in random ages, and not in desirable ages like 777 (Lamech's age at death) or ages that end frequently with a 0 or 5 digit. Furthermore, our biblical author evidently wishes to have Methuselah dying in the year of the flood.³⁷ He cannot achieve that by luck, hoping his formula will, by some fluke, produce the necessary age datum. No, the ages are chosen first. And since that is the case, it is obvious that the numbers are not the product of a numerological scheme, but that a numerological scheme has been applied (by the author/redactor) to the numbers.

To insist, against this evidence, that the numbers are the result of a numerological scheme is to accept one of two very unlikely scenarios. The first is that the biblical writer constructed fine-looking formulas with no end number in view and which, when calculated, achieved the serendipitous result of a disproportionate percentage of numbers with final digits of 0 or 5, and of special numbers like 777 or 365. Furthermore, with the exception of the 365, nearly all of the formulas resulted in numbers that, in the first genealogy, hovered around the 900 or more mark, and in the second produced a near-consistent downward trend! If these numbers are artificial, their individual and combined character is to be understood as the product of teleology and not serendipity.

The second unlikely scenario is that the writer used ready-made formulas from some kind of list—a Mesopotamian numerologist's almanac, if you will. But where is the evidence of such an almanac? And why would one exist, since, in any case, multiple formulas might well exist for every number.

³⁵The two formulas, taken from Hill, are, respectively, Adam's age at death and Methuselah's age at death.

³⁶Recall Hill's comment cited earlier: "It was important to associate one's life with the right numbers" (Hill, "Making Sense," 242).

³⁷The numbers as found in the MT produce this result. The LXX does not.

The idea that, for the Mesopotamians, “it was important to associate one’s life with the right numbers,”³⁸ may or may not be true (Hill offers no evidence for this assertion). But such an assertion demands the concomitant understanding that not every number was “right.” That means Hill’s coterie of eleven numbers was certainly not the basis for these “right” numbers; it must have been a much more restrictive list, consisting perhaps of only two or three numbers of which sixty was one. Only then could there exist a select number of “right” numbers defined by sexagesimal formulas. Obviously, then, Hill’s eleven-number scheme is irrelevant to the alleged reality of Mesopotamian numerology as Hill describes it. Indeed, on every practical level, her proposed scheme seems unlikely, if not impossible.

The Issue of Preferred Numbers

Preferred Numbers in Genesis

The rejection of a numerological scheme does not, however, imply the rejection of what Hill calls “preferred numbers.”³⁹ It is uncontested that the numbers three, seven, twelve, and forty appear frequently in both Testaments, and that their use is often connected with highly significant events. The result of such usage is that these numbers are themselves invested with a special significance. While no significance need be attached to the fact that Zebulun, for example, had three sons (Gen 46:14), there is cause for reflection when we observe that Lamech lived 777 years. As if the number were not significant enough in itself, the fact that this Lamech named his son Noah, meaning “rest”⁴⁰—recalling God’s rest on the seventh day (Gen 2:3)—seems more than coincidental. To the modern reader, Enoch’s total lifespan of 365 years is similarly suggestive. But it is questionable whether the number 365 held much significance for a people who, from the evidence of the Old Testament, employed a calendar based on twelve thirty-day months (360 days).⁴¹ Nevertheless, for argument’s sake, let us accept that this number also, as used in the genealogy, is special.

³⁸Hill, “Making Sense,” 241.

³⁹Hill, “Making Sense,” 243.

⁴⁰Max Seligsohn, “Noah,” *JE* 9:319.

⁴¹The Egyptians were certainly aware that the lunar year was approximately 365 days in length. Although their civil calendar consisted of twelve thirty-day months, the Egyptians added an extra five days at the end of each year in order to reach the required total of 365 (Anthony Spaliner, “Ancient Egyptian Calendars,” in *Handbook of Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy*, ed. Clive L. N. Ruggles [New York: Springer, 2015], 1489). In respect to the Israelites, Scripture itself gives few clues as to their exact calendrical practices. Witness to thirty-day months and 360-day years is found in the apocalyptic prophecies (cf. Dan 7:25; Rev 12:6, 13; 13:5). Every few years a “second Adar” (Adar was the Babylonian name for the twelfth month) was added in order to keep the festival dates aligned with the agricultural realities (“Adar,” *ISBE* 1:51). It may be reasonable to assume that the Israelites were nevertheless aware of the 365-day solar cycle as witnessed in the Egyptian civil calendar. However, given that Scripture itself knows only 360-day years, it seems odd that the writer of Genesis would have elected to append the number “365” to Enoch: why not “360”?

Mention may be made of the apparent significance of “seven” in connection with certain individuals in the Genesis genealogies. For example, a Lamech appears as seventh in the line from Adam, through Cain. More detail in the narrative is accorded him than any other in the line. Similarly, more detail is given to Enoch, seventh in the line from Adam, through Seth. In the Gen 5 genealogy, another Lamech appears, whose age at death is given as 777.⁴² On one level, then, the first Lamech is parallel with Enoch, both being seventh in the line. On another level, the first Lamech parallels the second, sharing the same name. Laurence Turner observes that there is one speech recorded in each of the two genealogies (Gen 4 and Gen 5): both are given by a character named Lamech.⁴³ Again, in the listing of Jacob’s sons upon their entry into Egypt, the seventh (Gad) has just seven sons; more than that, the numerical value of his name turns out to be exactly seven (‘g’ = 3 and ‘d’ = 4; the vowels in Hebrew have no numerical value).⁴⁴ After noting also that the total number from Jacob’s family who moved to Egypt was seventy, Turner concludes: “One suspects that a list with these characteristics is providing more than simply bald genealogical data.”⁴⁵

Perhaps it is. Turner relates the recurring “sevens” of the genealogies back to the creation account of Gen 1.⁴⁶ The seventh day marked the completion of God’s work of creation, by which chaos had been transformed into order. And just as God had first demonstrated his sovereignty over creation, so the patterns and orderliness of the genealogies are intended to bear witness to God’s sovereignty in human history.⁴⁷ Is Turner suggesting that the names, positioning of names, and numerical data of the genealogies are to some degree contrived in order to make this theological point? Or that God so ordered the events of history that the individuals in these genealogies lived and died and spoke and were given names by his sovereign direction? Or, perhaps, that the Lord moved upon the writer of Genesis so to order the (historical?) material as to make the patterns with their theological import? Turner does not say. But if God truly is sovereign, as the genealogies are said to remind us, there need be no objection to the suggestion that there were just ten generations from Adam to Noah, that Enoch was exactly the seventh generation from Adam, and that Lamech did live 777 years.⁴⁸ This idea will be explored further, below.

⁴²Laurence Turner, *Back to the Present: Encountering Genesis in the 21st Century* (Grantham, England: Autumn House, 2004), 69–70.

⁴³Ibid., 75.

⁴⁴Ibid., 71.

⁴⁵Ibid., 72.

⁴⁶Turner notes that the creation account of Gen 1 is stated to be *toledoth* (genealogy; Gen 2:4a), as is the genealogy of Gen 5 (Gen 5:1); see *ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁷Ibid., 73.

⁴⁸One hesitates to include the idea, propounded by Turner, that the first Lamech (in Cain’s line) was seventh from Adam. It is true: he was. But he is not presented as such in the text (as Turner acknowledges; see *ibid.*, 69). The genealogy begins with Cain, not with Adam, making Lamech sixth in the genealogy. One can *make* Lamech

Attention has also been drawn to the ages associated with Noah and his son Shem. Noah was 500 years old when he begot "Shem, Ham, and Japheth"; Shem was one hundred years old when he begot Arphaxad, and lived a further 500 years after the birth of that son. Donald A. Huebner draws out the implication of these numbers:

Noah . . . was 500 years old when his sons were born and the Flood followed 100 years later when he was 600. His son Shem . . . became a father when he was 100 years old and he lived 500 more years, dying at the age of 600. The chance of this being anything other than a fabricated, symbolic use of special numbers is miniscule.⁴⁹

The numbers associated with Abraham also appear oddly deliberate: he was called out of Ur when he was seventy-five years old; had Isaac at the age of one hundred, exactly twenty-five years later; and died at the age of 175, exactly one hundred years after coming out of Ur. Did it just so happen that these events took place at these ages? Technically, Abraham's life events do not belong to the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies,⁵⁰ yet his case is interesting for precisely that reason. For whereas the numbers in the genealogies are simply given, those in Abraham's life are connected with particular events and therefore provide a means by which to assess (at least partially) the integrity of these numbers.

So it is said that Abraham had lived "ten years in the land [of Canaan]" (Gen 16:3) when his wife suggested he procure a son through her maid Hagar. Since he had departed from Haran at the age of seventy-five (Gen 12:4), he must at this time have been about eighty-five years old. And indeed he is stated to have been "eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael" (Gen 16:16). Thirteen years later, at the age of "ninety-nine" (Gen 17:1), God appears to Abraham and promises that Sarah herself will bear a son "at this set time next year" (v. 21). In the same chapter, Ishmael is circumcised. Crucially, he is stated to be "thirteen years old" (v. 25) and Abraham is again noted as being ninety-nine (v. 24). Why is there the need to repeat Abraham's age? We cannot know for certain the biblical writer's reason, but we can know with certainty the result: all the age data connected with particular events

parallel with Enoch (by counting from Adam), but the text itself makes no attempt to do so. Had the author of Genesis wished to make such a parallel, he would have either commenced the genealogy with Adam or introduced another name somewhere between Cain and Lamech. If, as many suppose, there were numerous missing generations in the Genesis genealogies, finding an extra name would have presented no difficulty to the author. Beginning the genealogy with Cain is, of course, significant: the line of Cain stands in contrast with the line of Adam. The latter genealogy is sometimes referred to as the "Sethite" genealogy, perhaps in order to contrast these two sons of Adam. But Hasel correctly points out that Scripture does not call it the Sethite Genealogy but "the genealogy of Adam" ("Genesis 5 and 11," 24).

⁴⁹Donald A. Huebner, "Biblical Longevities: Some Questions and Issues," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 63.4 (2011): 288.

⁵⁰Though, as suggested above (n. 17), the connection between the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies and the narrative material of the same book is intimate.

in Abraham's life, at least up until he is one hundred years old, cohere. Into the equation we must also factor Isaac's age at his mother's death. Sarah breathed her last at the age of 127 (Gen 23:1). Since she was ten years younger than her husband (Gen 17:17)—around ninety years old when she had Isaac—that would mean Isaac was a young man of some thirty-seven years when his mother died. In the chapter following that which records Sarah's death is the account of the procuring of a wife for Isaac. We are not told directly how much time elapsed between Sarah's death and Isaac's marriage. Subsequently, however, it is noted that Isaac was "forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife" (Gen 25:20). Again, the numbers and narrative details cohere. Thus, because of the interlocking nature of the events and numerical data, if the figures of seventy-five, ten, and one hundred for Abraham and forty for Isaac are contrived, so are all the rest, and the entire fabric of the narrative begins to unravel.

But if these numbers are not contrived, they must be real. And if they are real, the coincidences are amazing, unless it is suggested that the providential hand of God was controlling events in individual lives and that he has a seeming predilection for certain numbers. If this were the case in the lives of Abram and Isaac, it could equally be the case with Noah and Shem and others.

The Forty-year Reigns of David and Solomon

This leads us to ponder other incidents involving preferred numbers. Both David and Solomon are recorded as reigning for forty years.⁵¹ David and Solomon, of course, are the seminal figures of the monarchy; that both should be said to reign for forty years may seem, to some minds, as just too neat. In

⁵¹According to one NT reference, Saul, too, reigned for forty years (Acts 13:21), though some scholars find reason to doubt the accuracy of that figure. See, for example, R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1944), 521; J. Bradley Chance, *Acts*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, ed. Mark K. McElroy (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007), 216–217; Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987), 104. There is but one chronological OT note regarding Saul's reign (1 Sam 13:1), though it is problematic. It is possible that the Hebrew is corrupt in this verse, although the issue is too complex to explore here. The length of Saul's reign is not stated in the OT—the only Hebrew monarch for whom that is the case. The omission is puzzling, intriguing. Perhaps it is meant to indicate the illegitimacy of his reign. Saul was the king the people wanted. As a Benjamite, he was not of the line from whom the future monarch was forecast to come (Gen 49:10). It was David who was the king of God's choosing and the one after whom the messianic dynasty is named. If the forty years Luke ascribes to Saul's reign is accepted, what must be seen as significant is the fact that this regnal period is the same for the first three kings of the Israelite monarchy, while no subsequent king reigned for the same length of time. It is not easy to know what to make of this. But it is tempting to consider it in relation to a possible typological function of the first three kings of Israel. For an engaging, popular study on the typology of Saul, David, and Solomon, see Roy Hession, *Not I, But Christ: Our Relationship With Jesus in the Story of David* (Farmington Hills, MI: Oil Lamp Books, 2010).

the case of David, the “forty” is clearly rounded, because David really “reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years” (2 Sam 5:5; cf. v. 4). That the forty years is thus divided into two unequal periods argues for the integrity of the numerical data, particularly since one of those periods is given as “seven years and six months.” Seven is a preferred number. Were the biblical writer making up the data, one would expect him to have appended the “six months” to the other period (the thirty-three years), rather than squander the opportunity to present a pure seven years. That is, he might have suggested that David “reigned over Judah seven years, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years and six months.” In the later book of 1 Kings, however, the “six months” is dropped from the “seven years and six months”: “The period that David reigned over Israel was forty years: seven years he reigned in Hebron, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years” (1 Kgs 2:11). Here we find two preferred numbers (forty and seven) together. Yet the fact that Scripture has already made it clear that the seven years were really seven years and six months tells us that while the number has been rounded, it has not been fabricated.

In the case of Solomon, there are no additional biblical chronological data that can corroborate a forty-year reign. But Scripture does not treat her readers as fools. Examples are provided in certain cases and not repeated for every similar case.⁵² As seen here, the forty years for David is a rounded number, though very close to the actual figure. Should Solomon have reigned some thirty-nine or forty-one years, it should raise no eyebrows to find that the biblical author chose to record his reign as a round forty.⁵³ Typologically,

⁵²One example will suffice. Near the end of his Gospel, John writes: “Truly Jesus did many other signs . . . which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30–31). A similar comment would have been appropriate in each of the other three Gospels. But it was not necessary for God to inspire all four Gospel writers to make the same comment. Having it in one is sufficient; the reader is expected to apply it in other appropriate cases.

⁵³While no additional *biblical* data exists that can corroborate a forty-year reign for Solomon, a remarkable confirmation appears to be available from the so-called Tyrian King List. From the chronological material in this list that is constructed entirely independent of any biblical chronological data, it is possible to establish the beginning of the construction of Solomon’s temple as occurring in 968/967 BCE. This would have to correlate to the fourth year of Solomon’s reign (1 Kgs 6:1). If the division of the kingdom after the death of Solomon is dated to 931/930 BCE (Edwin R. Thiele’s widely accepted date; see *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 3rd ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983], 78, 217), one is left with a regnal length of forty years for Solomon. I am indebted to Rodger C. Young for directing me to the relevance of the Tyrian King List to the matter of Solomon’s reign. For a more in-depth discussion of the King List, see Young’s “Three Verifications of Thiele’s Date for the Beginning of the Divided Kingdom,” *AUSS* 45:2 (2007): 163–189, especially 179–187. On the precise date of Solomon’s death, see again Young, “When Did Solomon Die?” *JETS* 46:4 (2003): 589–603. Young provides detailed arguments that he claims establish Solomon’s death as occurring between Nisan 931 BCE and Tishri

both David and Solomon represent Christ—the one as Christ the shepherd king (cf. Ezek 34:23–24), the other as Christ the king of glory (cf. 1 Kgs 4:21, 24–25; Matt 6:29). Why may it not be that God, in his providence, had both these kings reign for a similar period of time simply because of the typological significance of their reigns? In any case, given the care in which the lengths of the reigns of every one of the kings of Judah and Israel is recorded, it would seem odd to impute a falsified regnal length to just these two kings.

Jacob's Family of Seventy

Hill refers to the family of Jacob, seventy in number, who went down to Egypt (Gen 46:27). She claims that the number seventy “was symbolic among the Israelites for any family blessed with fertility (e.g., the seventy “sons” of Jacob who went down to Egypt ...).”⁵⁴ But, again, the number “seventy” in this case does not appear to be contrived, since each of the seventy individuals is named. In fact, however, the number of sons who went with Jacob was only sixty-seven. This number includes grandsons; but, unusually, it also includes one daughter (Dinah, through Leah) and one granddaughter (Serah, through Asher). We may presume that Jacob’s name brings the total to seventy, as is allowed by the text: “All the persons of the house of Jacob who went to Egypt were seventy” (Gen 46:27).

It is possible to mount the argument that the biblical writer omitted some names from Jacob’s family in order to have no more than seventy as a total. But at least three considerations combine to demand the repudiation of any such suggestion. First, the careful recording of names, noting to which mother they belonged, and providing subtotals for each group, indicates that the writer is concerned to provide a thorough listing. Second, the distribution of children and grandchildren is strongly inconsistent with any schematization. For example, Benjamin is recorded as having ten sons—more (in most cases, many more) than any of his brothers. Yet Benjamin was the youngest; one might expect that his family would be the smallest, not the largest, at the time of entry into Egypt. By contrast, Dan, the fifth oldest, produced only one son. Some sons (Judah, Asher) had grandsons; others did not. If the biblical writer was adding or omitting names to achieve a particular total, it is almost unbelievable that he would have allowed Benjamin ten sons and left Dan with only one, and that he would have included two grandsons each to Judah and Asher while, again, recording only one descendant for Dan.⁵⁵ Third, it is

931 BCE, that is, the *first* half of the year beginning in Nisan 931 BCE rather than the second half as “assumed” by Thiele (Young, “When Did Solomon Die?” 591).

⁵⁴Hill, “Making Sense,” 243.

⁵⁵There are difficulties in ascribing ten sons to Benjamin, given his young age at the time of the entry into Egypt. Various solutions have been offered in the commentaries. The genealogical listing for Benjamin in Num 26:38–40 lists only five sons and two grandsons, the grandsons having the same names as two of the sons mentioned in the Genesis list. Again, solutions have been offered, but two considerations need to be kept in mind: (1) if it be deemed unlikely that the youthful Benjamin could have had ten sons by the time of the entry into Egypt, it is even less likely that he could have

similarly to be doubted that the author would have included two women—one of whom plays no role in any narrative—in order to make the desired total, if there had been additional sons who could have been included in the list.⁵⁶

It is therefore incumbent upon us to accept that the number of Jacob's household that went down into Egypt really was seventy, no matter how "preferred" that number might be. Similarly, however preferred the number forty might be, that would seem to be how many years David reigned. There is not space here to consider more of the many such examples where preferred numbers can be demonstrated, with reasonable certainty, to be literal. Hill herself poses an important question when she asks, "In the case of all these preferred numbers [throughout Scripture], which are to be considered literal and which figurative?"⁵⁷ There is, she admits, no way to know: "How such symbolic numbers were meant at the time of writing is something that we may only guess at today, and if a specific principle ever underlay such figurative numbers, it is no longer readily apparent."⁵⁸ This, however, does not prevent her from claiming that in many cases these preferred numbers are used symbolically or figuratively.⁵⁹ Oddly, she recognizes an alternative understanding, but seems to accord it no significance: "Unless we assume that God prefers certain numbers over other numbers, and somehow passed that preference down to the Hebrews, we must acknowledge that in many

been a grandfather by that same time. There is therefore merit in the suggestion of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (SDABC) that the two grandsons listed in Num 26:40 were not identical to the sons of Benjamin (Gen 46:21) but were so named by their father in memory of two brothers who had died; see on Gen 46:21, F. D. Nichol, ed., SDABC, 7 vols. (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1978), 1:469; (2) regardless of the solutions that have been offered in the various commentaries, the point being made here is unaffected, since the fact remains that the writer of Genesis lists ten sons for Benjamin: he would hardly have fabricated such an obvious difficulty. It may just be that Benjamin was more precocious or more fecund than his brothers (cf. 1 Chr 4:27).

⁵⁶The inclusion of Dinah can be accounted for on the basis that, following her aborted marriage to Shechem, she remained single. The SDABC suggests that she therefore was counted as an independent unit (Nichol, SDABC, 1:469). This may be so. But *justification* for her inclusion does not imply the *necessity* of her inclusion. Had another son been available, would not the author have included his, rather than the woman's, name in order to reach the desired total? This argument would seem to lose its force if it were the case that there were several more sons over and above the seventy. For if several sons were already omitted from the list (in order to keep it at seventy), one more omission to make way for Dinah would hardly matter. But this objection is itself susceptible of criticism. First, on what basis would some sons, and not others, be considered 'extra'? Second, the 'extras' would almost certainly have had to be grandsons, not sons. For it is almost unthinkable that the biblical writer would have included two grandsons (to Judah and Asher) among the seventy while omitting sons. Third, why do no subsequent genealogical lists give any hint of those extra sons?

⁵⁷Hill, "Making Sense," 243.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

cases where preferred numbers are used in the Bible, they are to be taken symbolically or figuratively.”⁶⁰ But the option that Hill so easily skipped over deserves consideration.

God and Preferred Numbers

We may begin by considering more carefully the first clauses of Hill’s aforementioned statement: “Unless we assume that God prefers certain numbers over other numbers, and somehow passed that preference down to the Hebrews”⁶¹

That the author recognizes this as a possible option, but chooses to bypass it completely without offering any justification for doing so, may be taken to mean that she considers it of no relevance or value to the discussion. Why? Her statement here falls only a little short of ridicule—as though we cannot possibly entertain the idea that God would use particular numbers in a particular way. Yet every time the historical veracity of the numbers in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies is questioned on the basis that some of those numbers are preferred numbers, there is an implicit denial that God would carry out his purposes within the restrictions of human numerical systems. In this, Hill is hardly alone.

But if the concept of providence is to be accepted at all, it would seem unnecessary to argue that it be allowed to embrace matters of time and timing. For timing is an integral aspect of providence; it is hard to imagine a providential act that does not occur at the very moment God ordains it to occur. What does God ever do that is not timed to perfection? This is a crucial observation, for time and timing often involve numbers. Thus, in the providence of the Almighty, the Son of God was born “in the fullness of the time” (Gal 4:4). That time was foreordained and foretold in a prophecy that was based upon numbers (Dan 9:24–25). Furthermore those numbers were not random or haphazard: the prophecy was based upon multiples of “seven”—a preferred number. Whether or not God passed down to the Hebrews his preference for the number seven—the option that Hill evidently finds so unappealing—or that God made use of human systems of numbering is, at this point, unimportant. The question to be considered is: Does Scripture provide evidence that might indicate God’s purposeful use of preferred numbers? Such evidence will now be considered.

God’s Providence in the Numbers

Abraham and Joseph

As already noted here, there is good reason to believe that the chronological data recorded for various events in Abraham’s life should be accepted at face value. It is necessary to reinforce the point made earlier: if we reject any of those chronological items on the basis that they happen to be preferred

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

numbers, the collateral damage to much of the narrative connected with Abraham is considerable. The interconnection of the narrative details and the chronological items is sufficient to support the claim that they stand or fall together. For example, if Abraham was seven-fifty years old when he left Haran, dwelt in Canaan for ten years before taking Hagar as a concubine, and begot Isaac one year after Ishmael was circumcised at thirteen years of age, then it is beyond question that he was around one hundred years old when the son of promise was born. It was at God's behest that Abraham left Ur and then Haran. Abraham did not choose to become an exile and a pilgrim in celebration of reaching his seventy-fifth year! The birth of Isaac was a direct miracle: it was God who chose to provide a child when Abraham reached his one hundredth year. Whatever the implications of those facts, we must simply accept the evidence that God on these occasions chose to use numbers that human beings might regard as special.

This evidence is not singular. The book of Genesis records a period of seven years of plenty followed immediately by seven years of famine in Egypt during the time of Joseph. The number "seven" is here clearly not intended to be understood as symbolic. For when Joseph eventually revealed himself to his brothers, he informed them that two years of famine had passed and five more remained (Gen 45:6). That the years of feast and famine came about by God's providence is stated specifically in the text (Gen 41:25, 28, 32). Why God in this case "preferred" periods of seven years rather than two or five or eight is not revealed. What is revealed is that this is exactly what God did do.

Pharaoh and the Exodus

One of the most direct biblical statements of God's providential hand in the life of an individual occurs in connection with the pharaoh of the Exodus. Through Moses, God declared to the Egyptian ruler: "But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show my power in you" (Exod 9:16). It is not just that God raised up this pharaoh, but that he raised him up at that time. Again, there is mystery in this divine process; here is one place, surely, where "his ways [are] past finding out" (Rom 11:33). Yet the existence of this individual at that particular time and in that particular place, and God's self-testimony on that fact, is evidence of one way in which God manages human affairs.⁶² The idea that the LORD may have caused Enoch to be born exactly seven generations after Adam, and Eber (whose name suggests "Hebrew") seven generations after Enoch, is neither impossible nor implausible. If it is accepted that the details of the Israelite cultic system were not Moses's own but communicated to him by God, then one is confronted by an astonishing divine preoccupation with the number "seven" (cf. Exod 12:15; 22:30; 25:37; 29:30; 29:37; Lev 4:6; 12:2; 13:4; 23:15, 18; 1 Kgs 7:17; Ezek 40:22; 41:3; etc.).

⁶²Whether this is the case for every individual born, or whether only for selected individuals for whom God has a particular purpose at a particular time, is a question that lies beyond the focus of the present discussion.

Furthermore, the providential timing for the life of this individual (pharaoh) is mirrored in the providential timing of the wider Exodus event itself. For it was "on that very same day" (Exod 12:41) that God miraculously brought to an end a sojourn the length of which had been prophesied four centuries earlier (Gen 15:13). Clearly, the Almighty's interventions in human affairs at both the national and the individual level are not haphazard in terms of timing. As with the prophesied birth of Jesus, that timing may be revealed through numbers.

Israel's Forty Years in the Wilderness

As with the seven years of famine in the days of Joseph in Egypt, the forty years in which Israel wandered in the wilderness was a set period that God imposed upon the nation. The forty years were based on the forty days in which the spies had surveyed the land of Canaan. Although the number "forty" is significant, being a preferred number, what is more significant, for the moment, is that God then used that same number in his judgment upon the nation. That, in itself, does not prove that God was seizing the opportunity to make use of a preferred number; had the spies done their work for, say, twenty or thirty-three days, their years of punishment would, presumably, have matched the days of spying out the land. But it does, at a minimum, indicate that God's interactions with humanity include engaging with them at a numerical level. Whether the spies took forty days by God's leading, whether they purposely chose that period of time conscious of the significance of the number, or whether they just so happened to conclude their business in exactly forty days does not matter: the point is that God entered into the Israelites' world of numbers.

We may recall also the "forty days and forty nights" that "the rain was on the earth" in the days of Noah (Gen 7:12). In this case, the forty days and nights are part of a careful chronology: the rain began "in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month" (v. 11); it "prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days" (v. 24); this period finished "in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month" (8:4); and "in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dried" (8:14). These periods are also linked with the chronology of Noah's life: the rain began "in the six hundredth year of Noah's life" (7:11) and the drying up of the earth was accomplished "in the six hundred and first year" (8:13). Besides the number "forty," the only other numbers upon which there could be any suspicion of artificiality in this account are "seventh," "one hundred and fifty" and "six hundred." But if these numbers are artificial, what is their meaning in connection with the event? Why were they selected rather than others? For example, why were forty days selected and not seventy? And why did the biblical author not bother to use special numbers for the other events in this chronicle—the "second month," the "seventeenth day," and the "twenty-seventh day"? Indeed, if no special meaning vis-à-vis the events can be attached to all or most of the numbers, why would the author bother to provide such a detailed chronicle at all, unless it was to provide a faithful chronicle of an

important event? And if in so doing he chose to use some special numbers, why did he also use nonspecial numbers? Does not the admixture of both special and non-special numbers argue for the integrity of them all?

The number “forty” is, of course, significant also in the NT. Each of the synoptic Gospels records that Jesus was forty days in the wilderness. This does not seem to have been a case of the gospel writers conspiring to use a preferred number. It is an impressive fact that each of the three OT texts that Jesus cited against Satan were drawn from the Pentateuchal narratives connected with Israel’s forty years in the wilderness.⁶³ Must we entertain the idea that Jesus’ selection of these particular texts was random, that by some happy felicity they all derive from the same period of Israel’s history—a period, moreover, whose length in years precisely equals the length in days of Jesus’ wilderness experience? It is not even necessary to know whether or not Jesus himself purposely chose to remain in the desert for this period of time. He entered the desert driven by the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:12); quite likely the conclusion of his wilderness experience came also at the behest of the Spirit of God. It is therefore consistent to demand at least the possibility that this same Spirit inspired other special time periods in the Bible.

On this point, indeed, we may consider the use of the number seventy in the prophecies of both Jeremiah and Daniel. The prophet Jeremiah announced to his countrymen that the Babylonians would dominate their neighbors for “seventy years” (Jer 25:11–12; 29:10).⁶⁴ The prophet Daniel is subsequently

⁶³Hans K. LaRondelle writes, “In his deliberate fasting for exactly forty days, Jesus reenacted the experience of Israel, but manifested ultimate obedience to God by His appeal to the revealed word of God to Israel. . . . The remarkable fact is that Christ, as His answer to the three temptations, each time quoted a passage from the book of Deuteronomy, chapters six through eight, when other passages were available.” On this point, LaRondelle cites Robert T. France, who suggests that Christ perhaps saw in these chapters a pattern for his own time of testing. See LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 64–65.

⁶⁴The actual period of Judah’s captivity in Babylon was slightly less than that (605 BCE to 538 BCE), whether because a merciful God cut the days short (cf. Matt 24:22) or because “approximately seventy years” may legitimately be stated as “seventy years.” On the other hand, it may be that the return from exile occurred somewhat later than 538 BCE. To begin with, one recent study has dated the first full year of Cyrus as 537/536 BCE (Steven Anderson, “Darius the Mede: A Reappraisal,” [PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2014]). Furthermore, Andrew E. Steinmann has pointed out that, while permission for the exiles to return to Palestine was granted in Cyrus’s first year, it would have taken some months or even years to sell property and make other necessary arrangements for the return; see “A Chronological Note: The Return of the Exiles under Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel (Ezra 1–2),” *JETS* 51.3 (2008): 521–522. Steinmann further argues that the Jews would have reentered their land in a sabbatical year, which can be calculated with certainty as 533 BCE (ibid., 521). If Steinmann is correct in his proposal that the exiles returned in 533 BCE (and in this author’s opinion, his arguments on this precise point are not strong), it clearly does not help in confirming an exact seventy-year period of captivity. Nevertheless, his suggestion that time would have been required to make the necessary

given a prophecy that builds on Jeremiah's "seventy" (Dan 9:2, 24–27). The fact that Daniel's thoughts had turned toward the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy at about the time the seventy years were drawing to a close, shows that he certainly did not regard the "seventy" as anything other than literal (Dan 9:2). Daniel's "seventy weeks" is, significantly, divided into periods: seven "sevens," sixty-two "sevens," and one "seven" (Dan 9:25–27). If we accept at face value the claims of both Jeremiah and Daniel, and the testimony of 2 Pet 1:20, these prophecies came not by the will of the prophets but by the will of the Holy Spirit. The use of this preferred number—seven, and its multiples—was, therefore, ordered by God.

The preceding are just a sampling of the many examples that Scripture provides of the way in which God himself has been pleased to employ "preferred" numbers. Since this phenomenon may be firmly established—provided one accepts a supernatural inspiration of Scripture—we cannot discount the possibility that special numbers such as 777, 365, 75, 100, 500, 600, and any others found in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies, might be real numbers, reflecting the actual lengths of events and lives, obtained through the providence of God. That is, Lamech did actually live for 777 years, and did so by the special providence and purpose of God. Again, God himself ordained that Abraham should be one hundred years old at the birth of Isaac.

An Orderly God

It would be unfortunately anthropocentric to claim that the love of order, balance, and symmetry are intrinsically human concerns. Do they not rather derive from the One who has made us in his own image?⁶⁵ If we admit the direct hand of God in the creation of living creatures, we are drawn to the conclusion that God is a lover of symmetry and balance. The number and arrangement of eyes and ears, mouth and nose, limbs and digits, are in no cases haphazard. And if human beings have been inclined to favor numbers such as two, four, five, and ten, they have likely done so because these are numbers that they see repeatedly in the world of nature and living creatures. One would not need to look far: each of these numbers is evident in the human body. By contrast, the extensive, and early, use of the number seven in Scripture must have a different explanation. The prior existence of the Sabbath still seems to be the best, perhaps the only, reasonable explanation for the fixation upon a number for which there is no obvious example in nature.⁶⁶

arrangements to leave Babylon and Anderson's chronological revision of Cyrus's first year are, in combination, helpful. A preparation time of just one or two years (instead of the five that Steinmann defends) following 537/536 BCE would produce a return date that more closely fulfills the seventy-year prophecy. I am indebted again to Robert C. Young for directing my attention to Anderson's and Steinmann's two articles.

⁶⁵Thus the Corinthian church members are admonished to do all things "decently and in order" because "God is not the author of confusion but of peace" (1 Cor 14:40, 33).

⁶⁶It is obviously insufficient to suggest that the biblical authors used the number "seven" because of a practice (Sabbath-keeping) that was already firmly established in their culture. That is no doubt true, but the question must be: Why was a *seventh*-day

The origins of the decimal system may not be known with certainty, but it would not be irresponsible to postulate that having ten fingers and toes had something to do with it. With the power of ten, of course, numbers such as four and seven become forty and seventy, numbers that are well attested in Scripture. Again, the number one hundred, along with its fourfold division into twenty-five, fifty, and seventy-five, may be easily accounted for. With this in mind, we must question any tendency to be surprised at the suggestion that the Creator might have worked with such numbers in both his providential “girding” of men’s lives and his girding of men’s minds in the production of the sacred record. The numbers themselves arise from the Lord’s creativity. It is not to be wondered at that he frequently employed them in his providential activity in salvation history.

Summary

A good deal of ground has been covered in this discussion. The major points now need to be reviewed. It is true that both schematization and patterns are to be found in the pages of Scripture. While schematization may often include the use of patterns, the latter is not necessarily indicative of the former, since patterns can exist naturally.

There are definite patterns and parallels in the number of generations in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies. Yet it is not a simple ten-ten pattern. Instead, there is a complex three-fold system of parallels so constituted that it argues against schematization of the data.

At first glance the age data associated with each generation of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies appear to be artificial. Yet proving that to be the case is not a simple task. Makous has shown through a series of statistical analyses that the numbers do not demonstrate the usual characteristics of artificial numbers. Furthermore, it seems likely that some of the numbers have been rounded. But while rounding means the numbers are, strictly speaking, no longer random, rounding numbers does not make them artificial.

If the numbers are artificial, it is likely they have been concocted as part of a scheme. But what is the scheme? Hill is one who has tried to show that the biblical writer has employed a numerological scheme. Yet it has been shown here that such a scheme fails on logical and practical grounds. Hill has produced no solid evidence that would mandate preferring her numerological scheme above another. The fact that any particular number can be expressed by a variety of formulas is the first stroke of the death knell of such numerological schemes. That the age data of Gen 5 and 11, especially when taken together, cannot have been the product of numerological formulas means that the application of formulas is nothing more than an exercise in interpretive imagination.

While only one numerological scheme was closely analyzed here, the principles adduced from that analysis can, with appropriate caution, be

Sabbath instituted in the first place? If the fondness for the number produced the practice of Sabbath-keeping, what explanation can be given for the choice falling upon a number which has so little importance in nature?

generalized. First, that a scheme can be applied to an existing set of numbers does not prove that such a scheme produced those same numbers. Second, with minimal imagination and experiment, almost any number can be expressed formulaically using a small group of predetermined numbers. Third, it is not at all apparent what purpose any particular numerological scheme might originally have had, much less what significance ought to be attached to any of its individual formulas. Fourth, it is not apparent why one particular scheme's supposed purpose should be preferred over another's. Post hoc patternization proves nothing, unless the suggested scheme can establish its validity exclusive of competing schemes. Fifth, the greater the number of suggested schemes, more than one of which cannot be true at the same time, the greater the skepticism that naturally appends to each. Sixth, suggested schemes are not subordinated to normal exegetical practice; on the contrary, the meaning of the text is supposed to derive, at least in part, from the scheme. Seventh, there is no direct evidence that the Genesis genealogies were constructed on the basis of any scheme; there is therefore nothing in any such scheme that can legitimately commend itself to the exegete, nor to the historian, nor to the theologian.

The use of striking-looking numbers and preferred numbers in the genealogies and beyond is acknowledged. Yet there are not a few cases in the biblical record where the context in which preferred numbers are used makes it possible to determine, with reasonable likelihood, that the preferred numbers are real numbers. Some such cases suggest the possibility that God himself chose to direct events according to a timetable that followed preferred, rather than random, numbers.

Further evidence that God has frequently accommodated himself to Israel's supposed love of preferred numbers may be found in certain prophetic messages, which were sometimes given based on such numbers. Furthermore, the origin of preferred numbers seems to lie in structures that God himself has placed in living things rather than lying in the arbitrary choice of human beings. The significance of the number "seven," too, in its connection with the Sabbath, finds its origin in the arbitrary will of God. The numbers four, five, seven, and ten, and their multiples, should therefore be recognized as God's preferred numbers—placed by him in nature or imposed (in the case of the Sabbath) upon human society. It should occasion no surprise that he would use them at significant moments in salvation history and in the record of that history.

In conclusion, none of the usual claims for schematization of names and numbers in the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 survives close scrutiny. On the contrary, the apparent nonrandomness and special features that are observed in the genealogical data are found to have reasonable biblical explanations. It does not seem right to reject reasonable explanations drawn from solid biblical principles and examples in favor of imposed systems of schematization for which there is so little biblical support. Consequently, sound judgment suggests the numerical data of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies be accepted for what they purport to be: real numbers pertaining to real events and real people.