Andrews University Seminary Studies, Vol. 53, No. 2, 253-277.
Copyright © 2015 Andrews University Seminary Studies.

REVISITING GENESIS 5 AND 11: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE CHRONOGENEALOGIES

BERNARD WHITE
Busan, South Korea

The genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 are unique in the Scripture record. Gerhard Hasel's term *chronogenealogy* captures a major aspect of that uniqueness: they are genealogies with a major chronological component.[1] By including ages at the birth of each named son, the number of years each individual lived after begetting that son, and the stated or implied total years of life for each individual, the two genealogies appear to provide a means by which to calculate the approximate number of years from Adam to Abraham.[2] For

[1]Gerhard F. Hasel, "Genesis 5 and 11: Chronogenealogies in the Biblical History of Beginnings," *Origins* 7.1 (1980): 23–37; "The Meaning of the Chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11," *Origins* 7.2 (1980): 53–70. Hasel's term seems to have been adopted only by those inclined to accept a prima facie chronological intent of the two genealogies. See, for example, Jonathan Sarfati, "Biblical Chronogenealogies," *TJ* 17.3 (2003): 14-18; Travis R. Freeman, "The Genesis 5 and 11 Fluidity Question," *TJ* 19.2 (2005): 83–90. Chronological data is occasionally found in other genealogical material (Ex 6:16, 18, 20; 1 Chron 2:21); the significance of these 'rarities' will be explored at a later point in this paper.

[2]Bishop Ussher famously did just that—with injudicious precision!—in the mid-seventeenth century. But it is a pity that his name alone is so often cited in this respect, with the implication that using the chronological details of Gen 5 and 11 to estimate time since creation is to follow in his steps. Ussher was just one of very many in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who used biblical chronology to estimate (Luther/Calvin, et al.) or calculate (Ussher/Lightfoot) the earth's age (Davis A. Young and Ralph F. Stearley, "The Age of the Earth Through the Seventeenth Century," *The Bible, Rocks, and Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 27–46). Estimates as to the age of the earth based upon biblical data are in no sense dependent upon Ussher's (or Lightfoot's) incautiously precise date of creation. A precise dating is not possible, even if one accepts the chronological intent of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies and the integrity of the numerical data. Rounding off has certainly occurred: ages are given only in whole years, never in months (in contrast with, for example, David's reign of seven years and six months over Judah (2 Sam 5:5, cf. 1 Ki 2:11). Rounding may sometimes have occurred to the closest unit of 5 years, but it was certainly not uniformly the case (e.g. Seth died at age 912, Jared at 962, Methuselah at 969, Lamech at 777). Walter Makous, in his statistical analysis of the genealogical numbers, notes that while rounding contributes little to the error variance of the totals, "it does prevent one from reconciling all the data on biblical chronologies exactly" ("Biblical Longevities: Empirical Data or Fabricated Numbers?" *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 63.2 [2011]: 123). Attempts at finding mathematical patterns (such as a sexagesimal system) in the numbers have engaged the minds of some scholars (see, for example, R. K. Harrison, "From Adam to Noah: A Reconsideration of the Antediluvian Patriarchs'

many scholars, however, a number of factors combine to suggest caution in using the numerical data in these genealogies to build a chronology: the numbers evidence a degree of schematization; the lifespans seem mythical in their inordinate length; the genealogies belong to a period of primeval history; and, not least of all, the disharmony between the implied length of that era and the evidence of archaeological and secular historical records suggest that the genealogies are incomplete.

The assumption that there are gaps in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies is now almost de rigueur in scholarly discussions on the subject. The demonstrable existence of gaps in a number of other biblical genealogies is deemed sufficient evidence that gaps are also possible in the Genesis genealogies; the evidence of long ages in the geologic and secular historical records mandates, for many, that gaps are a certainty. The fact that the genealogies contain a tight interweaving of numerical data that, prima facie, mitigates against the possibility of generational gaps is not allowed to disturb this received view. Nevertheless, a few voices have lodged protest against the too-easy disregard of the implications of the numerical data of Gen 5 and 11.

Hasel's is among the most significant of these voices. By carefully comparing the extant OT texts (the Masoretic, LXX, and Samaritan Pentateuch), Hasel has shown that the Samaritan text and particularly the LXX do indeed give evidence of purposeful systematization, but that the systematization in those texts stands in stark contrast to the *irregularity* of the Masoretic text.[3] His emphasis on the uniqueness of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies, reflected in his term "chronogenealogy," has not always been given the weight it deserves.[4] In light of their uniqueness, it is methodologically

Ages," *JETS* 37.2 [1994]: 164–168; L. M. Abrami, "The Ages of the Personalities in Genesis," *JBQ* 39.4 [2011]. Others have found such attempts unconvincing (see the discussion in Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987], 133-134). See also the discussion in Hasel, who concludes that such endeavors do at least take the numbers seriously rather than simply dismiss them as meaningless ("Meaning of the Chronogenealogies," 65).

[3]Hasel, "Genesis 5 and 11," 28–33. "Irregularity," he states, "is the mark of the Hebrew version" (33). Even accepting Hasel's arguments on this point, and accepting also Makous' statistical analysis (see previous footnote), it is still possible to harbor a suspicion that the numbers in the Hebrew version are, in at least some cases, contrived, throwing doubt on the remainder. The figure of 777 years for Lamech's life seems hard to accept as authentic. But such an attitude is possible only if one believes that (1) the special numbers found throughout the Bible, numbers such as 7 and 40, have their genesis in human contrivance rather than in the purposes and providence of God; (2) God has nothing to do with numbers and pattern and their meaning; and (3) God does not providentially determine a person's lifespan. These and other aspects of schematization are treated in a forthcoming article by the present author.

[4]Ibid., 25; Hasel, "Meaning of the Chronogenealogies," 53, 59, 62. Hasel's emphasis on the uniqueness of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies was an important contribution to the discussion. Here, I wish to build on that contribution by emphasizing again that uniqueness and by demonstrating that there are several other

unacceptable to suggest that these genealogies may well have gaps on the simple basis that some other biblical genealogies undeniably do. Hasel also argued on lexical grounds that the begetting in the chronogenealogies cannot refer to anything other than direct father–son relationships.[5]

Freeman's is another voice protesting the common scholarly dismissal of the chronological integrity of the genealogies. He has outlined the major arguments on both sides of the question.[6] His review leads to the observation that the 'gaps' theory has been countered from both a negative and a positive perspective. The first approach involves a point-by-point rebuttal of the major tenets upon which the 'gaps' theory is built;[7] the second insists upon the recognition that there are *genres* of genealogies, and that to extrapolate the principle of gaps from one genre (such as Matthew 1 or Ezra 7) to the quite different genre of Gen 5 and 11 is to commit a fundamental error.

Clearly, there has already been a good deal of scholarly endeavor that provides support for the 'no gaps' view. Yet much more can be said on this subject. There is in the Genesis material itself much positive evidence that argues for a chronological intention in the genealogies. Specifically, the biblical material suggests that (1) the uniquely overwhelming presence of the numbers in Gen 5 and 11 determines the special function of those genealogies; (2) the generations are contiguous; (3) the numbers *are intended* to be totaled; (4) the genealogies present an individual chronology for each generation, demonstrating an inherent chronological system in the genealogies; (5) the book of Genesis *begins* with a chronology that, furthermore, is described as a genealogy (Heb. *toledoth*), anticipating the pervasive chronological-genealogical emphasis throughout the entire book; (6) there exists a 'paragenealogy' that embraces the entire period from Adam to Joshua and which, consequently, suggests a unity of chronological intent in both genealogy and narrative; and (7) exegetical links further establish an intimate thematic and chronological unity between the genealogies and the ensuing narratives, such that to accept

---

features of these two genealogies that serve to highlight their relevance to matters of biblical chronology.

[5]Note Hasel's study of the Hebrew verb *yalad* (to give birth/beget) in "Meaning of the Chronogenealogies," 67. It is used only in the causative Hiphil form in Gen 5 and 11. Hasel notes that in all other uses of the verb in this form in Genesis and elsewhere, it always refers to direct biological succession.

[6]Freeman, "A New Look at the Genesis 5 and 11 Fluidity Problem," *AUSS* 42.2 (2004): 259–286.

[7]These tenets are (1) the similarity and order of the names in Cain's genealogy (Gen 4) and the Gen 5 genealogy indicate a common source which underwent fluidity during transmission; (2) "the symmetrical ten-generation form of the text and the prominence of the seventh position indicate schematization"; (3) a no-gap reading of the text results in an unbelievable overlap of the patriarchs' lives; (4) the two genealogies present family lines, not immediate descendants; (5) "extrabiblical evidence demonstrates that humankind originated earlier than a no-gap reading of Gen 5 and 11 will allow" (ibid., 269–283).

the chronological integrity of one and not the other seems arbitrary and inconsistent. These additional evidences will here be explored.

The Importance of the Numerical Data in Genesis 5 and 11

In referring to the "secondary character" of any numbers that might be found in genealogical lists, Oswalt has a point.[8] One may cite 1 Chron 2:21, which notes that Hezron was sixty years old when he married the daughter of Machir. Whatever the purpose of this somewhat incidental comment, it is certainly secondary to the purpose of the genealogy as a whole.[9] But Oswalt surely errs in not emphasizing that, outside of Gen 5 and 11, chronological data in genealogies is extremely rare. The detailed and extensive genealogies of the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles contain no chronological data except that of Hezron's age at marriage and items relating to the length of David's reign. Even the latter should not be included as exceptions since, in Oswalt's own schema, "numbers found in connection with royal annals or chronicles" constitute a separate class of chronological data.[10] In other words, the Davidic numbers in 1 Chronicles have been imported from an existing chronological system—the royal annals or chronicles; they are not a new item belonging intrinsically to the chronicler's genealogy (cf. 2 Sam 5:5). A further apparent exception is found in Exodus 6:16, 18, 20, where the lifespans of Levi, Kohath, and Amram are recorded. But, as will be shown below, there are reasons to view this pericope as belonging to a great, overarching chronological genealogy—a *paragenealogy*—that extends from Adam to Joshua and constitutes an extension of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies.[11]

[8]J. N. Oswalt, "Chronology of the OT," *ISBE*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:674.

[9]Hezron's "sixty years" is completely disconnected from any other chronological data. Since, therefore, it cannot be part of a chronology, if it has any purpose at all that purpose must be sought in the thematic material of the narrative.

[10]Oswalt, 674. Oswalt distinguishes three classes of chronological material in the Scriptures: genealogies, royal annals or chronicles, and random chronological statements" such as those found in Gen 15:13 and 1 Kgs 6:1.

[11]The constraints of space do not allow a detailed elucidation of what I here term a "paragenealogy." I expand on this in considerable detail in a forthcoming article. In brief, the generations from Adam through Joshua, as recorded in both genealogy and narrative, share a common feature that is essentially unique to those generations. With the sole exception of Jehoiada—a distant, lonely, statistical outlier (2 Chron 24:15)—only in these generations does Scripture record age of death. In every case the individuals are centenarians. The detail is supplied for a representative from every recorded generation. For the most part, the age data is recorded for just one individual per generation (the few exceptions are explainable), thus tracing a single line in the fashion of a linear genealogy. This surprising selectivity is strikingly observed in the genealogy of Levi, recorded in Ex 6:14–25. Of the forty names found in that pericope, age at death is given for just three, these three being the only direct ancestors listed between Moses and Jacob. The line from Adam through Seth through Abraham

In respect to numerical content, the uniqueness of Gen 5 and 11 needs to be acknowledged. It makes no sense to speak in general terms of sporadic chronological data in the various biblical genealogies and then to take broad conclusions supposedly gleaned from these and apply them to the material of Gen 5 and 11. As far as chronological data in genealogies goes, for all intents and purposes Gen 5 and 11 is the example. It is a suis generis. The proper understanding of the purpose of the numerical data in these two chapters must therefore arise primarily from a consideration of the material in situ rather than from the imposition of principles gleaned from markedly dissimilar genealogies.

In the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11, then, the numerical data dominates. This is particularly the case in the first genealogy, that of Adam to Noah. How striking the contrast with what we find in 1 Chronicles: "Adam, Seth, Enosh, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared . . ." (1 Chron 1:1–2).[12] Admittedly, the Chronicles genealogy, as with most others, is not always that terse: "Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. Mizraim begot Ludim," etc. (vv. 10–11). The genealogies of Jesus demonstrate similar features. There is simple recitation of names: Jesus was "the son of Joseph, the son of Heli . . . the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (Lk 3:23, 38). Matthew's descending genealogy reverses the direction: "Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers" (Matt 1:2). But as with 1 Chronicles, there is room for detail when desired: "Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah" (vv. 5–6).

Most of the examples just cited are vertical (or linear) genealogies, usually listing just one name for each generation. Horizontal (or segmented/branching) genealogies list siblings. Often, horizontal and vertical forms are mixed: "Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras" (1 Chron 1:3-5). The extra detail, observable in both types of

---

through Jacob is continued through Jacob's son Levi. From Moses the 'torch' passes to Joshua. He is not a biological descendant of Moses, but he is his spiritual successor in the following generation (cf. Josh 14:7 and Ex 7:7) and, importantly, also of the godly line of Israel. With Joshua, the age data—and the paragenealogy—ends. The existence of such a paragenealogy bears witness to both a unity and a shared chronological integrity of the Genesis chronogenealogical and narrative material. That the paragenealogy should finish with Joshua may be explainable by typology. Joshua's lifework was to bring Israel into Canaan. In this (as his name suggests), he is a type of Christ, the Savior of His people and the One who will bring them into Paradise. Adam, the first whose age is recorded in Scripture, is the one who (unwittingly) led the human race out of Paradise. Typologically, God's purpose in establishing a godly line—a people who call on the name of the Lord (Gen 4:26)—reaches its resolution when His people are brought into the promised land.

[12]All biblical quotations are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Authorised Version* (London: Samuel Bagster, 1982).

genealogy, can be extensive: "Now these were the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the children of Israel: Bela the son of Beor, and the name of his city was Dinhabah. And when Bela died, Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his place. When Jobab died, Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his place" (1 Chron 1:43–45). In some cases, the non-genealogical details can be so extensive as to make the form of the genealogy all but unrecognizable, as with the first part of the "genealogy" of Esau (Gen 36:1–8).

What is striking about these extra details is that details of a chronological nature are almost entirely absent.[13] There is no concern to state how old an individual was at his marriage,[14] at the birth of a son, or at his death, nor how long he stayed in one place or another. What dominates in all these genealogies are names and places. In Gen 5 and 11 it is conspicuously not so. Numbers—*ages*—dominate: "Seth lived one hundred and five years, and begot Enosh. After he begot Enosh, Seth lived eight hundred and seven years, and begot sons and daughters. So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died" (Gen 5:6–8). Two names; three numbers. Whatever one tries to make of these details—whether they are factually correct, whether there are gaps, whether the data is schematized—there is no escaping the dominating presence of the numbers.

When considering *other* genealogies, Oswalt's claim is almost self-evident: "the primary function of genealogy in the Near East has always been to establish a person's or family's identity. With regard to this purpose chronology has no importance." But the suggestion that such may be the case with the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 would, in the light of the above observations, be theologically inadequate. Oswalt does *not* directly attempt to make that case; but it is unfortunate that he so soon after asserts that chronological references in genealogies "when they occur . . . are not totaled or otherwise used for establishing chronological relationships."[15] To what can he be referring apart from the patriarchal genealogies of Gen 5 and 11? Random chronological data appear here and there in genealogical (and non-genealogical) texts, but by their very nature of being random they do not exist in connection with other such data, much less in a list; there is therefore nothing to be totaled.[16] Among the genealogies, total-ability exists only in the

[13]With very rare exceptions; see n. 1, above.

[14]Hezron's age at his remarriage, is the sole exception (1 Chron 2:21; see n. 9, above).

[15]Oswalt, 674.

[16]"Random" chronological statements is Oswalt's term (see n. 10, above). It embraces every chronological statement that cannot be included in his other two categories, genealogy and royal annals. As examples, he cites Gen 15:13 and 1 Kgs 6:1. Hasel similarly categorizes these texts using exactly the same phrase ("Meaning of the Chronogenealogies," 54). But a chronological item such as the note that Naomi's family dwelt ten years in Moab (Ruth 1:4) differs fundamentally from these two examples in that it is not connected with any other chronological referent. For this

two chronogenealogies.[17] However secondary the chronological details may be in other genealogies, it does not appear to be the case with those of Gen 5 and 11.

If, then, the chronological details of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies are not secondary, are they primary? In Scripture, genealogies functioned to indicate biological succession, title to land, eligibility for Levitical or Aaronic privileges, royal succession,[18] tribal/family membership, racial purity, and more.[19] Chronological concerns are plainly irrelevant to all of these; but did any of these functions pertain to the chronogenealogies? We can immediately eliminate three from the foregoing list: title to land, priestly privileges, and royal succession. The last two—tribal/family membership and racial purity—are likewise irrelevant to at least the first chronogenealogy. Harrison notes that the emphasis on families and tribes for genealogies was important for organizational purposes during the period of the wilderness wanderings;[20] that such arrangements were of no relevance to the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies does not need to be argued. Similarly, racial purity, for the Israelites, was a post-Abrahamic phenomenon. There is little biblical evidence of racial concepts prior to Abraham; indeed, just several generations before his, the world was one language and one speech (Gen 11:1, cf. 10:24f and 11:8f, 13–16). It is possible to argue that the genealogy of Gen 11 might have some connection with the Jewish interest in racial purity, because it traces the line back to Shem. But such an argument would founder on the fact that all of the non-Abrahamic Semites could do likewise.

The remaining function mentioned by Harrison is that of biological succession. But this function should not be regarded in the same light as the others in Harrison's list. It is a generic function. Every genealogy is based upon biological succession, as is clear from Harrison's opening definition of the term: a genealogy is "a record or catalog of an individual's descent from ancestors according to generations."[21] The various *special* functions that might

---

type of chronological data, I prefer the term "isolated," constituting a fourth category.

[17]In this paper, the term 'chronogenealogy' is used to distinguish the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 from the several other genealogies that occur in the book of Genesis.

[18]In including royal succession in this list, Harrison seems to take a different path from Oswalt, who places royal annals in a category separate from genealogy (see n. 10, above). Royal annals do display genealogical elements, but the genealogical aspect is not intrinsic to these annals, since succession is not necessarily biological (as when a dynasty change occurs) nor is it necessarily unidirectional (e.g. 2 Kgs 23:31, 34; 24:17). In this sense, Oswalt's distinction is to be preferred and is, in fact, consistent with Harrison's own definition of a genealogy (see below, n. 21).

[19]R. K. Harrison, "Genealogy," *ISBE* 2:425. Harrison mentions additional functions that pertained to minor genealogical records: tracing cultural or technological events (the line of Cain; Gen 4:17–22) and contrasting the purity of one line with another (Seth, as against Cain; Gen 4:25ff).

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid., 424. Compare: "Genealogies are oral or written lists of *kinship*

be accorded a genealogy, such as the others in Harrison's list, arise from the purposeful application of that recorded succession to the requirements and circumstances of the time. Given the early period to which the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies apply, some might find merit in assigning to them no special function beyond this 'generic function' of biological succession.[22] But the overwhelming presence of the numerical data does not permit this. Is it really possible to perceive particular, categorized functions for so many of the other genealogies—some of which display scant overt clues as to their purpose—yet deny the same to two genealogies that evidence such a startling uniqueness and which seem almost overburdened by very particular extraneous details attached, as they are, to every generation?

The genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 are, then, unique, and their uniqueness is expressed in an overt concern with numbers.[23] Their *special function* is to be defined from that uniqueness. The point may be pressed. Other genealogies, as has been seen, often include extra details not of a strictly genealogical nature. These extra details are haphazard, various, and non-standardized. That may at times make it a little difficult to determine the precise purpose of the genealogy to which they are attached. But in the case of the chronogenealogies, the extraneous details are regular, uniform, and standardized. The repetitive, uniform, formulaic nature of this extra data powerfully focuses attention on its essential character: we are looking at ages and lifespans. More than that, it reinforces the message that the numerical data is meant to be noticed. It is significant, also, that almost no *other* extraneous details are recorded.[24] This

relationships between persons or groups" (J. W. Wright, "Genealogies," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003], 346; emphasis mine).

[22]"The main object of the genealogies in Gn. 5 and 11 is apparently not so much to provide a full chronology as to supply a link from earliest man to the great crisis of the Flood and then from the Flood down through the line of Shem to Abraham, forefather of the Hebrew nation. The abbreviation of a genealogy by omission does not affect its value ideologically as a link." (K. A. Kitchen and T. C. Mitchell, "Chronology of the Old Testament," *NBD*, [Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1996] 187); "All he [the narrator of Genesis 11] was concerned about was tracing the line of election from Shem to Abram, pointing out that man continued to be fruitful and that his lifespan was somewhat curtailed, as 6:3 predicted" (Wenham, *Genesis* 1–15, 253).

[23]Richard M. Davidson likewise affirms these genealogies as unique, both when compared with other biblical genealogies and with non-biblical ANE genealogies ("Does Genesis really teach a recent, literal, seven-day Creation week and a global flood?" *Dialogue* 22.2–3 [2010]: 6). For comparison with the latter, Davidson (8 n. 6) refers the reader to Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 and their Alleged Babylonian Background," *AUSS* 16.2 (1978): 361–374.

[24]The exceptions are (1) Seth's being named by his father and being in the image of his father (Gen 5:2), (2) Enoch walking with God (Gen 5:24), and (3) the reason why Lamech named his son Noah (Gen 5:29). If this genealogy is taken to be chronological in its special function, all three extraneous details are closely related to this function. The first provides a double evidence that immediate parentage is in

paring of additional detail, with the exception of numerical data, allows the numerical data to take center stage.[25] It does not seem to be claiming too much to insist that the special purpose of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies is somehow connected with the numbers. The evidence can admit no less.[26]

---

view. (See main text, below, for further discussion on this point.) Enoch's walking with God seems to be connected with his being taken by God at an age hundreds of years younger than others in the genealogy. Lamech's naming of his son, and the comment on the meaning of the name, provide advance warning of the coming event that will interrupt the genealogy; furthermore, the fact that Noah was named by Lamech again functions as one of the several solid evidences that the generations in this genealogy are of immediate parentage. The extraneous details found in other genealogies are much more frequent and wide-ranging. They include places (Gen 4:16ff; 10:10–12; 25:16; 36:5, 20ff; 1 Chron 5:11), marriage (Gen 4:19; 1 Chron 1:32; 2:19, 21, 24, 26), occupations (Gen 4: 20–22; 1 Chron 2:55; 4:14, 23; 6:10), sins (Gen 4:23; 1 Chron 5:1, 25), abilities (Gen 10:8ff; 1 Chron 5:18), historical events (Gen 10:25; 1 Chron 4:21; 5:20–22, 25ff), possessions (Gen 36:7; 1 Chron 2:34), position/rank (Gen 36:15ff; 1 Chron 5:15), sisters (1 Chron 1:39; 2:16), childlessness/no sons (1 Chron 2:32, 34), fecundity (1 Chron 4:27); speeches (Gen 4:23ff; 1 Chron 4:9f), battles (1 Chron 4:41–43; 5:19ff), non-chronological numbers (1 Chron 4:27; 7:2, 4, 7, 9, 11), and tragedy (1 Chron 7:21–23). Many more examples could be added. In many of these groups of texts, the genealogy and narrative are so interwoven that the two genres become almost indistinguishable. Again, this is never the case in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies; they are focused on names and ages.

[25]Wenham suggests that the "sparseness" of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies invites comparison with the genealogies of Gen 25:12–18 and 36:1-8 [9–43], "other genealogies opening with 'This is the family history of' and characterized by telegraphic brevity of narrative" (*Genesis 1–15*, 248). In fact, the comparison yields contrast more than similarity. The genealogy of Ishmael (25:12-18) is certainly brief, comprising just two generations, Ishmael and his twelve sons. But it is hardly sparse in narrative comment: it provides details regarding the circumstances of Ishmael's birth, the number of Ishmael's children and the fact that they were princes, the relationship between their names and the names of their towns and settlements, the extent of their territory, and details of Ishmael's death. The genealogy of Esau (Gen 36:1–8) seems likewise burdened with detail when compared with the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies: we learn from where Esau took his wives, including their names and whose daughters they were; we read of Esau's possessions, where he had gained them, where he took them, and (in some detail) why; we are told where he subsequently dwelt and of his alternative name. All in just eight verses. Again, with the exception of Ishmael's age at death, chronological details are absent from these genealogies.

[26]It can, however, admit more. There is no reason why a genealogy may not have more than one special purpose. In the case of Gen 5 and 11, one purpose is apparently to trace the godly line (cf. Gen 4:26). That purpose is consistent with chronological concerns, as is obvious from the richness of the chronological data that accompanies the narratives that trace the godly line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

Nevertheless, there is a leap involved in claiming a chronology simply because of the presence of chronological details. Recall Hezron's marriage at age 60 (1 Chron 2:21): it is certainly a chronological detail, but it has no connection with any chronology. By itself, chronological detail does not a chronology make. Similarly, the three items of chronological detail in Exodus Six—the ages of Levi, Kohath, and Amram—do not establish a chronology, even if it is assumed that there are no missing generations from that line. This is because it is not stated how old these individuals were when they produced their sons. Chronology depends upon *connections.*

The genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 do, of course, contain such connections. By reporting the age of each father at the birth of his son, the computation of the passage of time from one generation to the next is not only possible but seems invited by the material.[27] Despite this, a significant number of scholars insist that, whatever the purpose of the chronological data in these two chapters, it is not intended that the ages of each generation be totaled. Scripture itself, it is claimed, does not total the ages.[28] It is claimed that there *must be* gaps between these generations,[29] although no one has yet suggested a plausible alternative reading of this material that can permit such gaps without doing violence to the tight interweaving of the numerical data.[30] To

[27]The 'invitational' aspect is a point that Hasel, too, has observed (see his "Meaning of the Chronogenealogies," 66).

[28]The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (hereafter, *SDABC*) notes that "no total is given" in the two genealogies, which it takes as evidence that the list of individuals may not be complete (*SDABC*, ed. Francis D. Nichol, rev. ed. [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976], 1:186). See also Oswalt: "no use is made of references [i.e., the numerical data] when they occur. They are not totaled or otherwise used for establishing chronological relationships" (674). The "no total" argument put forward by *SDABC,* Oswalt, and others is not new; compare William Henry Green, "Primeval Chronology," *BSac* 47 (April, 1890): 296–297.

[29]This "must be" appears to arise not from exegetical or theological considerations, but from the pressure of external archaeological and historical evidence. One example must suffice: "A literal Western interpretation of the figures as they stand yields too low a date for events recorded, *e.g.* the Flood . . . Hence an attempted interpretation must be sought along other lines. . . . In the case of genealogies, this involves the possibility of abbreviation by omission of some names in a series" (Kitchen and Mitchell, 187). Whatever the strengths of the external archaeological and historical evidence—and the evidence is impressive and not to be summarily dismissed—my concern here is solely with the biblical data.

[30]Freeman, "A New Look at the Genesis 5 and 11 Fluidity Problem," *AUSS* 42.2: 282. See, however, n. 34, below. Freeman summarizes and evaluates some common arguments used to counter the "gaps" theory (esp. pp. 272-286). They will not be repeated here, since my purpose is to set forth evidence *for* the chronological intent of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies rather than to present arguments *against* the contrary view. Nevertheless, it is difficult to resist commenting on the frequently aired argument that the extra Cainan placed between Arphaxad and Shelah in Luke's genealogy of Christ

suggest, for example, that Enoch was in fact Jared's grandson rather than his son is certainly permitted by the biblical usage of the word *son*. But it achieves nothing; the fact remains that Jared was 162 years old when Enoch—whoever he was—was born, and the passage of *time* from one individual to the next is unaffected.[31] That is why it is really pointless for commentators to speculate on supposed gaps in these particular genealogies. It is the *numbers*, not the names, that we have to deal with.[32] Theologians who maintain the conservative

---

is evidence of gaps in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies. Others have already noted, quite rightly, both that a huge number of gaps must be posited in order to bring the Gen 5 and 11 chronology (if such it is) into line with current archaeological and historical timelines, and that there is no precedent in Scripture for a genealogy that contains a larger number of gaps than names in the genealogy (as Gleason L. Archer, himself an advocate of the 'gaps' theory, admits; cited in Freeman, "A New Look," 263). After a brief consideration of the evidence, Hasel concludes, following Euringer (1909), that the words "of Cainan" were likely *later* added in the Luke manuscripts (Hasel, "Genesis 5 and 11," 32). But it may be noted, in addition, that the idea that this extra Cainan was to be found in sources available to Luke, who then chose to include the name in his genealogy, is problematic on logical grounds. Was there only *one* missing name from the Genesis genealogy? If the author (or editors) of Genesis knew of it, why didn't he include it? If there was *more* than one missing name, why was only one (of purportedly so many) preserved in the sources? Or if the sources had more than one extra name, why did Luke choose to include just this one? For Luke's genealogy of Christ, in contrast to that of Matthew, is completely unsystematized—a single, unbroken list of some 65 names; it cannot be claimed that he was trying to systematize that segment of the genealogy. If the author of Genesis—not to mention the compiler of 1 Chronicles—was not aware of the second Cainan, where did Luke find the name? Did he have access to ancient records that the writer of Genesis was unaware of? The LXX requisitions the numerical data from Salah (next in the genealogy) to be used with Cainan, evidence that the translators (or later editors) possessed only a name; how is it that in every other case names and numerical data were available but that in this one case, supposedly only the name survived?

[31]Furthermore, the word "son" is not actually used in the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 except in the case of Noah, who is *named* by Lamech, suggesting that Lamech was his immediate biological ancestor. Lexically, one must reckon with the meaning of the Hebrew *yalad* in its Hiphil form, as argued by Hasel (see n. 5, above).

[32]This claim is contradicted by a more sophisticated version of the 'gaps' theory. This theory has it that the repeated formula "X lived Y years, and begot Z" really means "X lived Y years, and begot someone in the line of descent that led to Z." Hasel traces this view back to Kitchen (Hasel, "Meaning of the Chronogenealogies," 54). It represents an attempt to acknowledge the historicity of the individuals in the genealogies and the integrity of the individual numerical data while at the same time denying chronological value to that data. This and similar theories are summarized in Freeman, "A New Look," 281, 265–266; see also Hasel, "Meaning of the Chronogenealogies," 62–69. The 'dynasty' view, in effect, attempts to deflect the stubborn chronological insistence of the numbers by shifting attention to the names. It requires the understanding that each name means at one point an individual and at

chronological reading of these genealogies can claim some justification in insisting that the numerical data cannot be manipulated.

But is it possible to find additional *positive* evidence to support the contention that these genealogies are intended to provide a chronology? In particular, are there any textual or contextual clues that might suggest the numbers are *meant* to be totaled? Six such clues may be advanced: (1) The textual evidence supports the view that biological sons are described in each generation. (2) Precise and felicitous numerical clues linking the two genealogies are superfluous if the numbers are not to be totaled. (3) The principle of totaling is already built into the genealogies themselves. (4) The life of each individual in Gen 5 and 11 is presented as a chronology, meaning that chronology is an inherent feature of the genealogies. (5) The unity of the genealogies and subsequent narratives argues for consistency in interpretation, meaning that the clear father-son connections of the subsequent narratives imply the same in the genealogies. (6) If the period from Adam to Terah is *not* covered by chronology, it would be unique in the biblical record. These six considerations must now be explored.

Evidence for Direct Biological Succession

As noted in footnote 28, a more sophisticated variation on the 'gaps' theory has been proposed that appears to respect the integrity of the chronological

---

another point a whole dynasty. Thus, "Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years, and begot the line of Enoch. After he begot the line of Enoch, Jared lived eight hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. . . . Enoch [the individual, last in the dynastic line] lived sixty-five years, and begot the line of Methuselah." Surprisingly, perhaps, it works, provided one is able to live with the fact that such use of a name is, according to Freeman, unattested in any other biblical genealogy (Freeman, "A New Look," 286). It does not, however, work for Adam. "Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him the line of Seth." It is worse for Lamech. "Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and begot a son. And he called his name the line of Noah, saying, 'This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands." Here would be a most singular case of Scripture recording the fact that a major figure in the Bible is prophetically named by his father, yet his name is not known or not deemed important enough to record. And what, precisely, would be the relationship between Noah and the three sons that he begot; were they, too, distant descendants? Who, in that case, entered the ark? While with some awkwardness it may be possible to insist that there are gaps between *some* of the generations and not between others (Adam/Seth, Seth/Enosh, Lamech/Noah, Noah/Shem), few scholars are likely to append their name to the idea that the formula "X lived Y years, and begot someone in the line of descent that led to Z" applies only for some of the generations. In summary, the name-dynasty theory allows its proponent to achieve a greatly lengthened chronology while at the same time respecting the historical and numerical integrity of the data and, in addition, avoiding the problem of numerous and lengthy gaps. Despite this achievement, the theory fails on two grounds: (1) it is entirely lacking in biblical linguistic evidence, and (2) when applied consistently for every generation, it results in nonsense.

data. The point at issue is whether the relationship between successive individuals really is one of immediate biological parenthood. Narrative clues in strategic places indicate that the relationships at the beginning and end of both genealogies are certainly immediate. Before the commencement of the first chronogenealogy, a mini-genealogy with narrative comment is given. "And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son *and named him* Seth." (Gen 4:25. Expressions in the biblical text connoting time parameters are emphasied throughout this article.). Similarly, "And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; *and he named him* Enosh." (Gen 4:26). This cannot be talking about a distant descendant; both are clearly cases of a parent naming their child.[33] The final generations of the first genealogy are those of Noah and his three sons. That they truly were his sons is clear from the Flood narrative. "On the very same day Noah and Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark" (Gen 7:13; cf. 1 Pet 3:20, which affirms that just eight souls were saved in the ark).

In the case of the Gen 11 genealogy, the final generations are those of Terah and Abram. As in the first genealogy, the father, at a certain age, begets three sons. As in the first genealogy, so in the second: they are immediate biological sons. Again, this is made clear in the subsequent narrative, where it is stated that one of those three sons (Haran) "died before his father Terah" (Gen 11:28) and that, subsequently, Terah took his deceased son's child Lot, along with his own son Abram and moved from Ur to Haran (Gen 11:28, 31).

Finally, what of the first generations of the second genealogy—Shem and Arphaxad? Evidence that supports an immediate father-son relationship is found in the previous chapter. Genesis 10 gives "the genealogy of the sons of Noah" (Gen 10:1). The three sons were all childless—or, at the least, took no children with them—when they entered the ark. However, "sons were

[33]This is particularly so in the first case: Seth's name indicates that he was a replacement for the son that Eve lost. Eve would hardly have waited another hundred-odd years (cf. Gen 5:6, 9) until she had a grandson, only then expressing her joy that God had appointed her a replacement for Abel! The second case gains added weight from its connection with the first: "And as for Seth, to him *also* a son was born; and he named him Enosh" (Gen 4:26). There would be no justification in understanding the first case as immediate descent and the second as not. Additionally, as Eve named Seth and Seth named Enosh, so also Lamech named Noah (Gen 5:29). There, too, immediate parentage is confirmed. Wenham, after noting these same details bluntly remarks that "it therefore requires special pleading to postulate long gaps elsewhere in the genealogy" (*Genesis*, 133). Sarfati has also put forward these 'naming' events as indicative of immediate father-son relationships, and as evidence that, in these locations at least, gaps in the Gen 5 genealogy are impossible ("Biblical Chronogenealogies," 16-17). As supportive evidence he cites Jude 14, which gives Enoch as the "seventh from Adam." Freeman cites a number of other scholars who likewise employ Jude 14 as testimony in this way ("A New Look," 282). But this text is not decisive, since it can be argued that Jude is simply stating that *in the genealogy as given in Genesis*, Enoch is in that position. Jude's citation cannot be seen as solid evidence for immediate relationship and, arguably, should not be urged as such.

born to them *after the flood*" (Gen 10:1). In what appears to be a conscious reminiscence of that notation, the Gen 11 genealogy begins with noting that Shem begot Arphaxad "two years after the flood" (Gen 11:10). Since he had no children at the time of the flood, it is quite impossible that Arphaxad, born a mere two years later, could have been anything other than an immediate son.[34]

Thus, it can be shown with virtual certainty that the first and last generations of both genealogies are of immediate father-son relationships. This is a fair indication that the generations in between, in both genealogies, are to be accepted as immediate biological descent in each case. The regularity of the fixed numerical formulae for all the generations is inexplicable, even misleading, if we are to suppose that these two lists contain an unfathomable mixture of immediate biological descent and lengthy gaps. Short of providing parallel genealogies or narrative material that proved immediate descent for every generation, Scripture could not make its intention more clear. The evidence favors understanding the chronogenealogies as describing immediate biological descent, each occurring within a specified timeframe. If this is the case, they are chronologies.

[34]It is possible to counter this argument with an appeal to the more 'sophisticated' gaps theory noted above (see n. 32). Perhaps this 'son' born two years after the flood was "someone in the line of Arphaxad"? Again, however, there is no biblical precedent for so understanding personal names. In addition, the genealogy relates that "the sons of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram. The sons of Aram were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. Arphaxad begot Salah, and Salah begot Eber. To Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg . . ." (Gen 10:22–25). The way in which this material is organized makes it virtually impossible to understand the five "sons of Shem" in v. 22 as anything other than brothers. Arphaxad, unexpectedly, is placed in the middle of the list of five "sons" of Shem, meaning that two names (Lud and Aram) are mentioned after him. This cannot be understood lineally, for when Arphaxad's descendants are listed (in v. 24), they are Salah and Eber, not Lud and Aram. The significant point is that Lud and Aram, along with Elam and Asshur, were his brothers. It is hard to believe that the Genesis author would have listed five *grandchildren* (or descendants) of Shem and omitted completely any reference to his children. Furthermore, if Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram were whole people groups several generations removed from Shem, one would wonder why there are only five. The progeny in the intervening generations would have resulted in many more people groups that could lay claim to Shem as their ancestor. A further, similar evidence of direct biological descent is to be found with Eber and his "two sons" (10:25). They are specifically said to be "brothers." The first was named Peleg, "for in his days the earth was divided." The other was Joktan, whose "sons" are then listed (vv. 26–29). As with the five sons of Shem, it is hardly likely that the author of Genesis would have provided such details for Eber's grandsons (or distant descendants) and completely omitted any reference to his own children.

Evidence That the Numbers Are Intended to Be Totaled

Any chronology depends upon connections, one piece of data connecting with another. This is exactly what is seen in Gen 5 and 11. In both genealogies, each individual item connects with the next, the crucial detail being the age of each individual at the birth of his son. Those connecting links are broken by the interruption of the Flood story; but, significantly, they are re-established in such a way that draws added attention to the chronological intention of these chapters.

The second genealogy begins in an unexpected manner: "Shem was one hundred years old, and begot Arphaxad two years after the flood" (Gen 11:10). Why here the chronological reference to the flood? The 'formula', established in the first genealogy and continued in the second, requires only the words, "Shem lived one hundred years and begot Arphaxad." It will be remembered that the first genealogy finished on a chronologically uncertain note: "And Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (Gen 5:32). Gen 10:21 implies that Japheth was the firstborn; if that is the case Noah's age when Shem was born is uncertain.[35] An otherwise unnecessary chronological detail in Gen 7 helps to provide certainty: "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life . . . the fountains of the great deep were broken up and the windows of heaven were opened" (Gen 7:11). This detail, when combined with Gen 11:10 shows that Shem was in fact born when Noah was 502 years old.

But these two details achieve something much more important than mere information as to ages: they allow a precise *chronological linking* of the two genealogies. One could therefore construct a single genealogy from Adam to Terah, rewriting the material for the two middle generations so that they conformed to the formula provided for the other generations, thus: "Noah lived five hundred and two years, and begot Shem," and "Shem lived one hundred years, and begot Arphaxad." Even Noah's age at death, missing from the genealogies, is provided in the post-Flood narrative material. Strikingly, the details are stated in a form never found elsewhere in the biblical narratives, yet one which is essentially identical to what is found in the preceding genealogy. In Noah's case, however, the year of the Flood substitutes for the year of his son's birth: "And Noah *lived after the flood* three hundred and fifty years. So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died" (Gen 9:28–29). The use of the genealogical formula at this point demonstrates that the interruption of the flood narrative is not allowed to affect the integrity of the total chronological concern of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies.[36] More

[35]Shem is apparently mentioned first because of his importance to the later chronology. The same pattern is seen with the final statement of the second genealogy: "Now Terah lived seventy years, and begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran" (Gen 11:26). A comparison with 11:32 and 12:1 suggests that Terah was, in fact, 130 years old when he begot Abraham.

[36]More than that, the use of the genealogical formula in the narrative is a clear indication of the essential unity of the chronogenealogies and the narratives that

than that, *the narrative gains an interest* in the genealogy by being included in the genealogical formula. With these purposeful, yet apparently incidental, additional details, the two genealogies form a seamless whole: they are, indeed, one.[37]

One must not be tempted to conclude that these connecting links simply demonstrate a continuity of names and lineage. That continuity is already apparent merely from the presence of Shem's name at the end of the first genealogy and its repetition at the beginning of the second; the numerical links are completely superfluous to that goal. Patrilineal continuity is evidently not the overriding purpose of these links. Unless one adopts the position that these vital connecting links are coincidental—pure happenstance—the implication is that an actual chronology is intended and that the numbers are essential to that chronology.

A second evidence that the numbers in Gen 5 and 11 are intended to be totaled is that the principle of totaling is already built into the genealogies themselves. In the first genealogy, the first two sets of numerical data for each individual are totaled, to provide ages at death. Strangely, in the second genealogy the first two sets are *not* totaled. Why? Is it believable that the writer of Genesis intended the reader to know the ages at death for the generations in the first genealogy but not for those in the second? On purely logical grounds, that idea seems highly improbable; it is completely excluded by the fact that the writer has provided for each individual from Shem to Nahor both sets of numerical data that are required to establish totals. Although the totals are not supplied in Gen 11, the *means* to do so are, and the *example* to do so is provided in Gen 5. The purposeful omission (for so it must be) of the totals in Gen 11 is inconsistent and odd, unless it be seen as an invitation to make totals where totals can be made.[38] The totaling in the first genealogy is the hermeneutical pattern, as the selected proofs for direct biological descent

---

follow each (on which, more below). It should be carefully noted that the linking of the first and second genealogies is made by means of reference to the Flood: Noah lived 350 years "after the flood" and Shem begot Arphaxad two years "after the flood." Furthermore, while the Flood narrative interrupts the genealogy, making the numerical data incomplete for both Noah and Shem, the necessary data is recoverable through that same narrative. The integrity of the chronogenealogical line from Adam to Abram is therefore dependent upon chronological details found within the Flood narrative. As will be seen below, there is between *each* genealogy and the narrative material that follows an intimate connection.

[37]The theological stance of the interpreter will determine whether he or she considers the intentionality to be that of the human author of Genesis or that of the divine Author (or both).

[38]C. John Collins, though one who accepts that there are gaps in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies, essentially admits the invitational aspect: "The life spans in Gen 11:10–26 (after the flood) are quite long, though trending downward (the narrator here leaves it to the reader to add up the numbers)" (*Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011], 151).

prior to each chronogenealogy (discussed above) are the hermeneutical pattern for all the generations.

The point needs to be pressed. Commentators have written much on the great ages and lifespans of the individuals of these genealogies. But it is just as important, if not more important, to enquire as to why the numbers have been written the way they are. If Scripture intended only for us to contemplate the ages of these individuals (for whatever reason), it would have been sufficient to simply state their ages (the third numerical item) in each case. Similarly, providing the age at birth for one son in each generation (the first numerical item) establishes a chronological intention, provided it is understood that immediate biological succession is understood for each generation. But the second numerical item—the remaining years of life after the birth of the mentioned son—is completely unnecessary to either end. Chronologically, it contributes nothing. Yet it is there. Furthermore, it is there, in the second genealogy, even when the meaningful third item is dropped! Again, only the first and third numerical items have any meaning in themselves. Why drop one of them and retain the only number that has *no* functional significance in itself? This second numerical item gains its meaning only in connection with the first *and exists for no other reason than to be added to that first item.* The inclusion of the second item and purposeful omission of the third is the strongest possible evidence that the reader is being invited to engage with the text and make the totals for him- or herself.

That totaling occurs (in the first genealogy) and that totaling by the reader is expected (in the second genealogy) are necessary conclusions from the data. Since it is clear that Scripture intended for the numerical data *within* each generation to be totaled, providing first the pattern then the invitation, it follows that the numerical data *from* each generation is also meant to be totaled. To insist that the one set of numbers is supposed to be totaled while the other is not, with no exegetical grounds for not doing so, is hermeneutically indefensible. The individual totals and the numerical connections are not devoid of purpose.[39]

[39]Freeman ("A New Look," 282, 285) has observed that the *first* numerical item is "superfluous and entirely without meaning" if a chronology is not intended. That would seem to be correct. However, it is possible, though admittedly counterintuitive, to argue that the age at which these individuals gave birth is of interest in itself. But there is virtually no evidence in Scripture that that is the ever case, except when the parents gave birth at exceptional ages. There are cases of exceptional age at begetting in the Gen 5 genealogy (Jared, 162; Lamech, 182; Noah, 500), but they don't explain why those for the other individuals are recorded. The difficulty increases with the second genealogy, where age at begetting is between twenty-nine and thirty-five, Shem and Terah being the only exceptions. Nevertheless, it is not entirely beyond the bounds of reason that this first numerical item is there simply for its own sake. Where my suggestion differs from that of Freeman and others is that it is the inherently meaningless second numerical item that is of such importance. *It* cannot be easily dismissed, since it only has meaning in connection with the first item and, furthermore, is rendered completely superfluous by the third. This second numerical item can only

Evidence that Chronology Is Inherent in the Genesis 5 and 11 Texts

A fourth evidence for chronology in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies lies in the recognition that chronology applies to individuals as well as to groups or eras. Thus, a chronology exists for Abraham's life: he is 75 when he leaves Haran (Gen 12:4); he moves about Canaan for 10 years before going in to Hagar (16:3); he has Isaac at age 100 (21:5), loses his wife 37 years later (17:17; 23:1), and dies 38 years after that (25:7). A chronology also exists for Joshua's life: he is 40 when sent by Moses to spy out the land (Josh 14:7), 85 when the partially conquered land of Canaan is divided among the tribes (14:10), and 110 when he dies (24:29). The data is less for Joshua than for Abraham, chronicling but two life events (plus his death); but it is a chronology nonetheless and spans his entire life. For the individuals of Gen 5 and 11 just one life event (the birth of a son) is chronicled; but the mere fact that that event is chronicled and that, in each case, the entire life is spanned, means that it is chronology in each individual's case. This point, combined with the previous, points to the stark fact that *chronology is inherent and pervasive in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies.*

The Intimate Relationship between the Genealogies and the Narratives

A fifth reason why chronological concerns appear to be central to the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 may be seen in the close connections between the genealogies and the narratives. This connection is indicated by the use of the numerical formula (of the first genealogy) in the Flood narrative (Gen 9:28f); indeed, the formulaic record of Noah's death formally brings to a close both the Flood narrative and the Adamic genealogy. But several more connections exist.

At first glance, the parallel endings of the two chronogenealogies are at once arresting and puzzling. The obvious parallel lies in the three sons being born to the last individual for whom chronological data is given: Noah, at five hundred years of age, begets Shem, Ham, and Japheth; Terah, at seventy years of age, begets Abram, Nahor, and Haran (Gen 5:32; 11:26). In each case, only one chronological detail is given; both subsequent narratives reveal that that detail does not apply to the first son mentioned, since he is not the firstborn; in both cases, the subsequent narratives make known the applicable age data.[40] The pattern is, however, profoundly disturbed by the fact that Noah is the important figure in the first genealogy, while that honor in the second belongs to Abram. Yet the two occupy different positions in the genealogy, as the following diagram shows:

---

be explained with reference to the principle of *totaling.*

[40]That is, that Noah is 502 at the birth of Shem, and Terah 130 at the birth of Abram.

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

Scholars generally ignore this obvious 'glitch' in the pattern and speak of the first genealogy as terminating with Noah (ten generations) and the second as terminating with Abram (also ten generations).[41] The bald fact that Noah and Abram are both tenth in the line is true; it is also true that the real point of interest following the second genealogy is with Abram, just as it is with Noah following the first. But Scripture initially, and most obviously, presents a parallel not between these two, but between Noah and Terah—the final fathers of their respective genealogies.[42] This receives confirmation in the fact

[41]So E. H. Merrill, "Chronology," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, 118–119: "There are ten generations from Adam through Noah . . . and ten more from Shem through Abraham"; N. M. Sarna, "Genesis, Book of," *EncJud* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972) 7:397: "The ten generations from Adam to Noah are paralleled by a like number separating Noah from Adam"; John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 35: "the genealogies between Adam and Noah, and Noah and Abraham, are each set up to contain ten members, with the last having three sons." Freeman, citing S. R. Külling, also notes that most scholars seem to have "overlooked" the fact that the genealogies are not really symmetrical ("A New Look," 273). Hasel had already pointed out that there was "no schematic ten-ten sequence" in his "Meaning of the Chronogenealogies," 60.

[42]The apparent ambiguity is recognized by Wenham: "Noah and Terah each stand at the beginning of a new age. But whereas Noah was the hero of the subsequent narrative, here it is Terah's son Abram that takes the limelight" (*Genesis*, 252). The key to understanding the obvious asymmetry of the terminal points of the two genealogies is to recognize that there is a *triple parallel.* On the one hand, Noah and Abram are parallels—both tenth in the line, and both the important figures. Secondly, Shem and Abram are parallels—both in the final generation of their respective lists, both one of three sons (and neither the firstborn), and both the ones who re-launch the tracing of the godly line following an interlude. Thirdly, as Wenham's comment suggests, Noah and Terah are parallels—both the final fathers of their respective lists, and, in addition, both the main subjects of the narrative interludes that immediately follow the two genealogies. Asymmetry also exists in the length and content of the interludes, necessarily so because of the asymmetry of the parallels. The first, much longer, interlude concerns Noah and his family; it is longer because Noah is the more important figure. The second interlude is shorter because Terah is the less important figure. The net effect of the asymmetry and of the complex of parallels is to highlight the interdependence of the genealogical and narrative material. This is so because the parallel between Noah and Abram draws attention to their importance in the narrative materials; the parallel between Shem and Abram relates especially to their function in picking up the threads of the interrupted genealogies; and the parallel between Noah

that the narrative interludes that interrupt both genealogies are concerned with these two individuals; both interludes provide the chronological data for their age at the birth of the first-mentioned sons; and both provide the fathers' age at death.[43]

If, then, Terah is parallel with Noah, with whom is Abram parallel? The answer can only be "Shem." Shem and Abram are the first-mentioned sons of the last fathers of the genealogies. Shem has a special function. He not only receives his first mention at the very end of the first genealogy, but he launches the continuation of the chronological material following the narrative concerning his father. Abram also receives his first mention at the very end of the second genealogy. He likewise launches the continuation of the chronological material following the narrative of his father:[44]

---

and Terah draws attention to the link between each genealogy and the subsequent narrative interlude. The usual one-sided emphasis on the parallel between Noah and Abram (their being the tenth name in each list) seems often to be used to bolster the claim that the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies are schematized, the implication being that they contain gaps: "The grouping into two sets of ten (Gen 5 and 11) suggests a simplified genealogical chain for ease in memorizing, somewhat like the three groups of fourteen in the Matthew 1 genealogy of Christ. Thus we may postulate a span of at least five to eight thousand years between Adam and Abraham" (Gleason L. Archer, "The Chronology of the Old Testament," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979], 1:361). Recognition of a complex of parallels is not only demanded by the biblical material, but automatically excludes such claims as that exemplified by Archer. Each of the three parallels is seen rather to exist in a symbiotic, mutually dependent relationship with the other parallels, the combined purpose of which is actually to affirm the interplay of chronological/genealogical material in the genealogies and narratives.

[43]That the narrative following the first genealogy focuses on Noah is well known. Note the first words of the narrative that follows the second genealogy: "This is the genealogy of *Terah* . . ." (Gen 11:27). It is, however, a genealogy with more narrative material than pure genealogy, including details of family tragedies, places, wives, daughters, and movements. Similarly, in Gen 6, with the first mention of Noah, another brief 'genealogy' is introduced: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. This is the genealogy of Noah . . ." (Gen 6:8-9). This brief genealogy is then followed by the first stage of God's plan in respect to having a godly nation on the earth: He purges that line through a flood, leaving a faithful remnant, Noah and his family. Similarly, following the brief genealogy of Terah, the second stage of God's plan for a godly nation is instituted: He purges Abram of his association with idolaters, this time not by removing them from him (as with Noah) but by removing him from them. These two methods illustrate God's dealings with the wicked and with his people at different times in salvation history. His plan for his people on earth is to call them out of Babylon (Rev 18:4, cf. 2 Cor 6:17); of this, Abram is the pattern. God's plan at the eschaton is to remove the wicked from his presence and from his people (Prov 25:4f); of this, Noah is the pattern (Matt 24:37–40, cf. Lk 17:36f).

[44]Notice the almost immediate chronological reference: "And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran" (Gen 12:4).

Noah **Shem** Interlude (*Noah*) Shem (Chronology/genealogy continues from Shem in *genealogy* form.)

Terah **Abram** Interlude (*Terah*) Abram (Chronology/genealogy continues from Abram in *narrative* form.)

In the case of Shem (and his descendants) the chronological material is encased in a formal genealogy; in the case of Abram (and his descendants) the chronological material is encased in a narrative. But the latter, in its richness of chronological material, is a narrative unlike any other. It is also a genealogy in essence, for its function is to trace the godly line generation by generation, albeit with greatly expanded narrative detail.[45]

The words immediately prior to the first chronogenealogy announce this function of tracing the godly line: "Then [after the birth of Enosh] men began to call on the name of the LORD" (Gen 4:26). The same expression is next used near the beginning of the Abraham story, where the patriarch is recorded as building an altar to the LORD in Canaan, east of Bethel; and there he "called on the name of the LORD" (Gen 12:8).[46] The generations

[45]J. W. Wright points out that "while biblical scholars usually consider only lists to be 'genealogies,' genealogies can take narrative form, and narrative-like expansions do appear within the biblical genealogies" ("Genealogies," in Alexander and Baker, 346). Kathleen M. O'Connor claims that the whole book of Genesis "is a kind of loose genealogy, because it establishes relationships of birth among all the family of Israel, between Israel and its neighboring people, and among all the peoples of the earth descended from the first couple in Eden" ("Genesis, Book of," *NIDB* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007] 2:542). My suggestion that the Genesis narrative, beginning with Abraham, is a genealogy in essence likely takes both these suggestions further than the authors envisaged them (see n. 11, above). It is not just that genealogies can take narrative form, nor even that the whole book of Genesis is a kind of loose genealogy. Rather, it is that there is a specific genealogical thread that traces a single line—a godly line—through the generations. That line begins with one of Adam's three named sons, Seth, and continues through one of Noah's three named sons, Shem, then through one of Terah's three named sons, Abram. (I am indebted to Gordon Wenham [*Genesis*, 248] for the observation that Adam fathered three named sons.) The Gen 5 and 11 genealogies and the subsequent narratives are unified *thematically* by this idea of a godly line; they are unified *technically* by the details of age and chronology. That the book of Genesis may be seen to contain such a unifying thread is consistent with the unifying presence of the *toledoth* formulas. The function of these formulas as markers may not necessarily be the same in each case—Daniel C. Harlow assigns to some the function to preface "a new round of narratives (6:9; 11:27; 37:2 [to which I would add 2:4]) or else a genealogy (5:1; 10:1, 27; 25:12; 36:1, 9)" ("Creation According to Genesis: Literary Genre, Cultural Context, Theological Truth," *Christian Scholar's Review* [2008]: 169–170). Nevertheless, the structurally unifying effect of these ten toledoth formulas seems evident. See also n. 49, below, for a specific application of the unifying function of toledoth.

[46]Twice more Abraham is recorded as calling on the name of the Lord (Gen 13:4;

that follow Abraham, as with the generations following Enosh, constitute that godly line. The use of the same expression, first, in connection with the chronogenealogies, and second, in connection with the major narrative that follows, is additional evidence of the unity of the chronogenealogies and narratives. This unity must be recognized. It is a unity of thematic focus—tracing the godly line (the genealogical aspect)—and of chronological intent. To acknowledge the chronological integrity of the narrative that begins with Abraham, while denying chronological integrity to the preceding genealogies is to fail to recognize this unity.

The Evidence of Scripture's Pervasive Interest in Chronology

There is a further reason to accord true chronological value to the numerical material of Gen 5 and 11, and it is that no other broad period of biblical history is denied the witness of biblical chronology. Given this extensive chronological concern, can it be that Scripture has no interest in one period—that which predates the Israel story? On purely logical grounds, this may be judged unlikely. But several additional considerations add weight to that assessment. They can here be considered only briefly.

First, the Bible story begins not with Israel but with mankind. We must allow for at least the possibility that chronological interest begins at the same point.[47] Second, the Flood story, which is sandwiched between the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies, is rather precisely chronicled. Why? Is it really important to know how long the rains fell and how long the flooding lasted?[48] The chronicling of the Flood is simply witness to Scripture's consistent interest in chronology. Third, the numerical data of Gen 5 and 11, through careful wording and linking passages, is both capable of chronological application and is to all appearances chronological in intent. Finally, Creation itself is presented as a chronology.[49] Whether or not one accepts the factual veracity

---

21:33); Isaac does likewise (Gen 26:25).

[47]The first eleven chapters of Genesis cover what is sometimes referred to as "universal" history (see, for example, Sarna, 386; William D. Barrick, "A Historical Adam: Young-Earth Creation View," in *Four Views on The Historical Adam*, ed. M. Barrett and A. B. Caneday [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013], 204). That the biblical record shows any interest in this period at all, and that Scripture evidences an interest in the chronological details of individuals throughout the entire period, undermine any suggestion that no chronology may be expected in these early chapters.

[48]Knowing how long the flooding lasted is certainly not important to anybody's salvation. Yet, in God's wisdom, Scripture has recorded the detail. Any suggestion that the age of the earth cannot be a concern of Scripture, since it is not important to our salvation, is an invalid argument and quite irrelevant to the issue. It is not for us to decide upon what basis anything is or is not recorded in Scripture. What matters, rather, is what Scripture *does* tell us.

[49]There is an intriguing similarity between the constitution of the chronological data of Gen 1 and that of Gen 5. In Gen 1, there are two units of time, an evening and a morning, which are totaled to make one day. The pattern is repeated throughout

of the data of Gen 1, it seems clear that Scripture *presents* the Creation as happening over a defined period of time.[50]

---

the chapter. In Gen 5, two items of time, an age at the birth of a child and a remaining time period, are totaled for one generation, and the pattern is repeated throughout the chapter. In neither Gen 1 nor Gen 5 are the individual totals added up to produce a grand total. In respect to the days of Creation, not until the twentieth chapter of Exodus is the obvious made plain: "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth" (Ex 20:11). That Scripture should at a later point confirm the intuitive understanding that the individual totals ("one day," "a second day," etc.) may be added up for a combined total for the whole period, establishes a precedent and a pattern to be followed. This chronological similarity between Gen 1 and the chronogenealogies receives remarkable confirmation in the use of the Hebrew *toledoth* to describe both God's creative work and man's pro-creative work. *Toledoth* occurs first in Gen 2:4; its next occurrence is in 5:1, introducing the genealogy. What is to be noted is, first, the close juxtaposition of these two uses of the word and, second, the fact that Gen 2:4 is "the only instance where this word is used of other than human relationships" (*SDABC* 1:221). In Gen 1, God generated in consecutive, contiguous days (however long one considers those days to be); and those days were chronicled. In Gen 5 and 11, human beings "made . . . in the likeness of God" (the reminder at the beginning of the first genealogy reinforces the connection with the Creation) likewise generated in consecutive, contiguous generations; and those generations were chronicled.

[50]David A. Sterchi, following Throntveit, Youngblood, and others, suggests that the days of Gen 1 need not be regarded as chronological; in Sterchi's view "the seven days are more like a numbered list" ("Does Genesis 1 Provide A Chronological Sequence?" *JETS* 39.4 [1996]: 536). One wonders: where does Day 7 fit in time and order, if it was not actually *last*? Did God rest before he finished his work? The text tells us *after* the sixth day that "the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them were finished" (Gen 2:1) and that God "ended his work" on the seventh day (2:2). Where would Sterchi place the sixth day, which reads like a summary of what has gone before (1:31)? The words "God saw *everything*" and "it was *very* good" would seem strangely out of place if Day 6 is to be reordered. What is puzzling is that Sterchi himself points out these features of Days 6 and 7. Yet it cannot be doubted what he means by his denial of the chronology. He cites Luke's account of the temptations of Christ, where Luke reverses the second and third temptations as given by Matthew. He also offers the illustration of a shopping list: the items on the original list are numbered, but the later recounting of the shopping experience *presents* the items in a different order—from least valuable to most valuable items, for example (534). His conclusion makes clear his intention: "The seven days are more like a numbered list. To claim that the text requires us to read it chronologically is to err by exceeding the meaning in the text" (536). It is not easy to know exactly how Sterchi envisages a rearrangement of the order, if indeed that is what he is suggesting. He acknowledges that the sixth and seventh days complete the creation; for those two days, in order to provide that emphasis, the Hebrew *yom* has the definite article, unlike for the first five days (533–534). Is he suggesting that only the first five days are dyschronological? What exactly is the relationship between the order in which God actually created and the order of days as presented in Gen 1? If a correspondence is there for the sixth and seventh

Summary and Conclusions

Prima facie, the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 present an unbroken line of individuals from Adam to Abraham, with numerical data that allows the construction of an approximate chronology for that period. The resulting chronology, however, is greatly at odds with that which widely-accepted geological, archaeological, and non-biblical historical records affirm. The philosophical problem that this presents the biblical scholar who wishes to respect the truthfulness of Scripture is significant. A seeming majority of evangelical scholars has elected to reevaluate the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies in order to harmonize them with these other sources. Whether or not that is a legitimate enterprise, it must be demanded that the biblical material be given every opportunity to present its case. I have here sought to demonstrate that the endeavor to harmonize these genealogies with secular chronologies finds little, if any, support in the biblical text. However, my purpose in this paper has been less to find fault with such harmonizing efforts than to explore more fully evidence that the biblical material is indeed concerned with providing a chronology for the 'primeval' period. I here briefly summarize that evidence.

First, the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies are unique. The overwhelming presence of numerical data, presented in a consistent, generation by generation, formulaic manner, has no parallel in Scripture.

Second, while the generic purpose of these genealogies is (like all others) to trace biological succession, their *special function* is determined, to some considerable degree, by the numerical data contained in them.

Third, whenever it is possible to verify that two successive generations either do or do not involve immediate biological succession, the result is always for the affirmative. This is evidence that all the generations should be so understood.

Fourth, although the numerical data obviously relates to *age*, especially age at death, six lines of evidence support the conclusion that the data is intended as a chronology. In particular, exegetical clues within the genealogies make it virtually certain that the author of Genesis intended the individual figures to be totaled wherever possible, while chronology at the individual level is indicative of an intended chronology at the broader historical level.

Fifth, since the special function of the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 is, in both cases, to present a chronology, Hasel's characterization of them as *chronogenealogies* is appropriate. Whether or not the resulting chronology is consistent with non-biblical chronologies, the character of the biblical material and the evident intent of the biblical author ought to be recognized.

days, why not for the first five? How can Day 6 be "climactic" (533) without implying temporal *order*? In order for his suggestion to have credibility, Sterchi would need to explicate in what ways the order of days (or divine events) as *presented* in Gen 1 might differ from the order in which God did actually create. Absent a credible alternative to the commonly accepted meaning of the numbered days in Gen 1, the account of creation as given in that chapter must be regarded as chronological, that is, occurring in the order as presented.

Sixth, there exists an intimate unity between the chronogenealogies and the narratives that follow each. This unity is *established* by verbal links and exegetical clues in the genealogies and narratives, while it is *evident* at the level both of thematic focus—tracing the godly line (the genealogical aspect)—and of chronological intent.

Seventh, the unity between the genealogies and the narratives finds further evidence in an apparent 'paragenealogy' that spans the period from Adam to Joshua. This unifying thread adds further weight to the foregoing conclusions regarding the chronological intent of the genealogies: the age at death recorded for each generation from Abraham to at least Joseph (the last patriarch in Genesis), in most cases along with age at begetting, is merely an extension of the thematic focus and chronological intent of the preceding genealogies.

Eighth, Scripture *begins* with chronology, with an ordered account of Creation that is presented in chronological fashion with features anticipating that of the genealogies. The link between Creation week and the chronogenealogies is reinforced by the use of the Hebrew term *toledoth*. This term is placed in summary position following the description of the Creation week and at the beginning of each chronogenealogy. As God's work of creation was chronicled, so too was man's work of procreation.

In conclusion, whatever philosophical and scientific difficulties may arise from understanding the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies as having a chronological intention, a mass of evidence points in just that direction. In seeking to understand the biblical story of creation vis-à-vis the findings of science and archaeology, it is not sufficient merely to suggest alternative readings of Gen 1 and 2. The chronogenealogies must be allowed to speak to the issue. They do so speak. And they will not go away.