Andrews University Seminary Studies, Vol. 54, No. 1, 3–29.
Copyright © 2016 Andrews University Seminary Studies.

ADAM TO JOSHUA: TRACING A PARAGENEALOGY

BERNARD WHITE
Busan, South Korea

Biblical genealogies demonstrate some broad characteristics that allow them to be categorized in various ways. One analysis suggests that genealogies may function to indicate biological succession, title to land, eligibility for Levitical or Aaronic privileges, royal succession, tribal/family membership, and ethnic purity. Additionally, some minor genealogical records trace cultural or technological events (the line of Cain; Gen 4:17–22) and contrast the purity of one line with another (Seth, as against Cain; Gen 4:25 f.).[1] This is a useful listing except that it fails to recognize a distinction that must be made between a genealogy's generic function and its special function.

Genealogies always have a common basic purpose, which is to establish belongingness to a particular group or family line. This is accomplished by listing biological relationships. Genealogies may be vertical (or linear), usually listing just one name for each generation, or they may be horizontal (or segmented/branching), including siblings with ancestors or descendants.[2] In practice, the two forms are often combined (as in 1 Chr 1:1–4, 24–28, etc.).[3]

[1]R. K. Harrison, "Genealogy," *ISBE* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 2:425. Harrison's analysis is not here suggested as definitive, but as representative of the fact that scholars recognize the functionality of the genealogies. That the biblical genealogies do function in particular and various ways is one of the major conclusions of Marshall D. Johnson's important monograph, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies: With Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 77–82. Johnson's work was first published in 1969, and thus predates Harrison by a decade. Referring to Johnson's work, Robert R. Wilson noted that subsequent studies of the genealogies would not be able to "generalize about their function or their value as historiographic sources. Rather, each genealogy must be considered individually" ("The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research," *JBL* 94.2 [1975], 172). The focus of scholarly investigation of the numerous OT genealogies includes: the similarities between the OT genealogies and their Near Eastern counterparts; the vertical or the horizontal genealogies; and the functions of the genealogies in the social, political, economic, and geographical arenas. The more important of these studies were summarized in Wilson, 169–89. Harrison's list, cited here, represents only one analysis. While a different analysis might yield a slightly different list, the important point is not affected: genealogies have various functions.

[2]For more on the provenance and usage of the terminology associated with genealogies, see Johnson, *Biblical Genealogies*, xi–xii.

[3]In most cases it is possible to determine whether a genealogy is behaving vertically or horizontally. Occasionally, however, the immediate text is ambiguous. For example, in 1 Chr 1:1–4 the descendants of Adam are listed: "Adam, Seth, Enosh . . . Methuselah,

In addition, however, the context of a particular genealogy—or extraneous details within the genealogy itself—may hint at an additional purpose that goes beyond the mere establishment of biological belongingness. This additional purpose, where it might exist, is its special function.

Thus, for example, Ezra's own genealogy (Ezra 7:1–5) traces his lineage vertically upwards as far back as Aaron. In common with all other genealogies, it reveals biological ancestry: this is its generic function. But why does Ezra finish the listing of ancestors with "Aaron the chief priest" (v. 5) and not further back with, say, Abraham? Clearly because Ezra was not here concerned with establishing that he was an Israelite, a member of the chosen race, but that he was of the priestly line. His genealogy has the special function of establishing his eligibility for Aaronic privileges.

In Harrison's list (see above, first paragraph), the suggested genealogical types indicate special function, with the exception of the first, for "biological succession" is the common element of every genealogy and therefore denotes not special, but generic function. This distinction is important, because if a particular biblical genealogy, displaying textual clues as to a special function, is deemed merely to be concerned with biological succession, an important special function may well be overlooked.

There is, of course, a degree of subjectivity involved in making pronouncements as to an author's particular purpose in providing genealogical material. We may consider, as further examples, the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew's and Luke's gospels. It is clear enough that both have as their broad intention—their generic function—to trace the lineage of Jesus Christ. But they are not identical. The first (Matthew's) is a descending linear genealogy, tracing the line forward from father to son; the second (Luke's) is an ascending linear genealogy, tracing the line backward from son to father. More significantly, the first traces the lineage from Abraham forward, ending with Christ; the second moves backwards from Christ all the way to Adam. Moreover, Matthew arranges the names in three groups of 14, likely drawn from the fact that the Hebrew letters for David's name add up to fourteen.[4]

Lamech, Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (NKJV is used throughout this article). It is only through a comparison with other texts (in this case, Gen 5:32 and 6:13) that we perceive the last three named were brothers; what begins as a vertical genealogy suddenly, and without textual indication, becomes a branching genealogy. Likely the author of 1 Chronicles anticipated no confusion, knowing that his readers would have been perfectly familiar with these names and their exact relationships to each other. Again, the genealogy for Ephraim's family (1 Chr 7:20–27) requires careful reading to determine where the genealogy is operating vertically and where horizontally.

[4]Each Hebrew consonantal letter has a numerical value. In the case of "David," the three consonants are DWD (Hebrew letters daleth, waw, daleth). Their values are D = 4, W = 6, D = 4, making a total of 14. Aspects of gematria as it relates to Matthew's genealogy of Jesus are discussed in W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew,* 3 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 1:161–65. The authors state that "the key to understanding the emphasis placed upon the number fourteen in [Matt] 1.2–17 is,

Because of this grouping arrangement and its beginning with Abraham, it seems reasonable to conclude that Matthew intends a special function for his genealogy; that being to present Jesus in his Jewishness: he is a king, the Son of David (cf. Matt 1:1).

Luke's genealogy is less distinctive. It is a simple recitation of names, one from each known generation, devoid of extraneous detail. If Luke intends for the genealogy to have a special function, that function is less immediately obvious than it is for Matthew's. The gospel writer traces Christ's lineage all the way back to Adam, uniquely concluding by noting Adam's sonship to God. This might be suggestive of a special function. Perhaps Luke wishes to remind us that Jesus belongs to all humanity, being, like all of us, a son of Adam. Or, perhaps he wishes to highlight the duality of Christ's nature: he is not only a son of Adam, but the son of God.[5] It might even be that Luke was merely being thorough, taking the genealogy as far back as possible. Although exegetical clues might favor the second of these suggestions, it is not possible to determine which of them certainly reflects the intention of the author.

It is clear, then, that there is some subjectivity involved in suggesting the special function of a particular genealogy. But it should be equally clear that the level of subjectivity will differ depending on the verbal clues present. In a previous article, I argued at length that exegetical and contextual clues within and around the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 bespeak a transparent purpose.[6] It is insufficient to characterize these genealogies as being merely concerned with biological succession. The imputation of nothing more than generic function might be pardonable were the names listed without extraneous detail, as in 1 Chr 1:1 ff. ("Adam, Seth, Enosh ...").[7] But the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies contain, in addition to names, material of such a pervasive and intrusive nature as to force the conclusion that they have a special function and that that special function must be related to the supplied numerical data.[8] These data are of

---

in all probability, gematria" (ibid., 87). Johnson, however, is of the opinion that the gematria (the numerical value of David's name) is of merely "coincidental significance" (*Biblical Genealogies*, xxiv).

[5]This may be why Luke places the genealogy immediately after the account of Jesus's baptism, at which the voice from heaven announced, "You are my beloved Son" (Luke 3:22). See, for example, Wilson, "Between 'Azel' and 'Azel': Interpreting the Biblical Genealogies," *BA* 42 (1979): 21.

[6]Bernard White, "Revisiting Genesis 5 and 11: A Closer Look at the Chronogenealogies," *AUSS* 53.2 (2015): 253–77.

[7]Even then, wider contextual clues might serve to modify that assessment and prompt the suggestion of a particular specific function.

[8]This is not to say that the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies do not also have tracing the godly line as their special function. I see no reason why genealogies may not sometimes have a dual purpose. However, even if one were to apply to genealogies D. J. A. Clines's insistence that a story can have only one theme (see his "Theme in Genesis 1–11," *CBQ* 38 [1976]: 485), the chronological purpose cannot legitimately be made to yield to this second purpose (tracing the godly line). The reason for this ought to be clear.

two kinds. One is of a static kind: we learn the age at death of each of the patriarchs. The other kind is dynamic: the data given for each name interrelate with those provided for each name immediately before and following them. Moreover, as I argued in my previous article, the data are presented in such a way as to invite the reader to engage with the numerical data. Bluntly put, we are invited to construct a chronology.[9] Consequently, there seems good reason to designate these two genealogies as "chronogenealogies."[10]

I further argued, in my earlier article, that the genealogical/chronological concern is not confined to Gen 5 and 11, but pervades the larger Genesis narrative. And it does so not in a haphazard manner. Rather, as the Genesis narratives proceed, we may discern an orderly continuation of the very genealogical and chronological concerns that begin with Adam, such that a single chronogenealogy may ultimately be constructed that demonstrates unique features not found in any other biblical genealogy. This single genealogical thread that begins with Adam and concludes decisively with

---

To begin with, the chronological data are, as noted above, intrusive and pervasive in both genealogies. It cannot be ignored, and the theme (or function) that it establishes may not be displaced. That the genealogies trace the godly line is, I believe, also a near certainty; there are sufficient clues in the text and context to establish the point. Yet those clues are less explicit, and more scattered, than the chronological data. More importantly, it could be argued that this purpose (tracing the godly line) is really nothing more than generic purpose. That it involves a very particular kind of people—the godly—is neither here nor there. Every genealogy does the same; the biblical genealogies, for the most part, trace the line of God's people through one specific tribe/family or another. In this aspect, the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies are not unique.

[9]Many commentators resist such a conclusion, seeing in these genealogies what amounts simply to a generic genealogical function. Thus the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies have as their purpose no more than 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" (K. A. Kitchen and T. C. Mitchell, "Chronology of the Old Testament," *NBD* [Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996], 187). Or, similarly, to "link Father Abraham . . . with Adam, who is otherwise hidden from the Israelites in the mists of antiquity" (C. John Collins, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist: Who They Were and Why You Should Care* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011], 57). The Gen 11 genealogy, according to Wenham, is given to trace the line of election from Shem to Abram (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15,* WBC 1 [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987], 253). I have elsewhere posed the question: "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?" (White, "Genesis 5 and 11," 260).

[10]The term is Gerhard F. Hasel's. See his "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.

Joshua I have termed a paragenealogy.[11] Evidence for this paragenealogy, its features and its function, will be explored in this paper.

Lifespans in Genesis and Beyond

The recorded ages for the biblical antediluvians and the postdiluvian patriarchs are truly extraordinary, though not unique in ancient annals. Most famous is the Sumerian King List, though the ages recorded there are of such length that they can be safely dismissed as exaggeration.[12] And while the ages of the earlier Genesis patriarchs likewise far exceed what has been witnessed in modern recorded history, the decline in longevity following the Flood—from 930 (Noah) to 600, to 438, to 433, then (with Abraham, six generations later) to 175—seems far less fantastical than the precipitous decline in regnal length from 18,600 (Ubara-Tutu, the last Sumerian king before the Flood) to 1200 (Jushur, the first king of Kish, following the Flood).[13] Nevertheless, it is not

[11]White, "Genesis 5 and 11," 256 n. 11. The para in paragenealogy is a Greek preposition meaning "beside" or "alongside." Thus the paragenealogy does not replace or compete with the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11, or with any others, but exists alongside them. Moreover, just as the membership of a parachurch organization is drawn from existing church bodies, so the paragenealogy draws from existing genealogical material. In respect to the inclusion of Joshua and the several generations preceding him in the paragenealogy, the data are, of course, drawn from outside of Genesis, specifically from Exod 6:16–20, Num 33:39, Deut 34:7, Josh 24:29, and Judg 2:8. Details concerning these later generations will be examined later in this article.

[12]The cuneiform document known today as the Sumerian King List (SKL) enumerates eight kings who lived before the flood. Their individual reigns total 241,200 years (an average of a little over 30,000 years each)! See L. M. Abrami, "The Ages of the Personalities in Genesis," *JBQ* 39.4 (2011): 258. Characterizing the recorded ages of the Sumerian kings as "greatly exaggerated," R. K. Harrison asserts "the probability that the apparently unwieldy numbers of the SKL are in fact accredited schematic mathematical formulations that, when interpreted as such, reveal the means by which they were constructed" ("From Adam to Noah: A Reconsideration of the Antediluvian Patriarchs' Ages," *JETS* 37.2 [1994]: 162). He attempts to show that the Gen 5 genealogy (he does not treat Gen 11) is similarly schematized, although on a mathematical base that varies from that used in Sumer. It may be noted that, while the SKL provides inordinate longevities for the kings of the earlier dynasties (particularly pre-flood), it does, however, witness to a very marked and sudden fall in longevity following the flood (William H. Shea, "The Antediluvians," *Origins* 18.1 [1991]: 14). Whether this is to be interpreted as indicating a shared mythology between Israel and its ANE neighbors or as indicating supporting evidence for the veracity of the less fantastic Genesis account will depend, to a not inconsiderable degree, on the presuppositions of the interpreter.

[13]Despite this, Walter Brueggemann states that "no critical commentator takes the numbers [of Gen 5] as historically valid" (*Genesis*, IBC [Atlanta: John Knox, 1982], 68).

the accuracy of the Genesis patriarchal lifespans that is of immediate interest here; it is, rather, the fact that Scripture records them.

The recording of age at death may seem hardly worthy of note; in most every biography it is customary to do so. In this, however, the Scripture record turns out to be surprisingly selective. With one notable exception, all specific references to age at death in Scripture occur in the period from Adam to Joshua (there are none in the NT).[14] All are centenarians. Furthermore, age at death is given for one—and usually only one—individual from every generation of this period.[15] This is remarkable. Was interest in age at death simply a passing fad? Is it mere coincidence that Scripture ceases to record ages at death around the same time that consistently extraordinary lifespans became a thing of the past? Given the consistent interest in age at death for the patriarchs, why does Scripture pass over the age at death of such important figures as Samson, Samuel, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and others? Joshua closes with reference to the death of "Eleazar the son of Aaron" (Josh 24:33). His place of burial is also noted. But there is no indication of his age at death, even though Joshua's age at death is noted just four verses earlier (v. 29). Similarly, Gideon was recorded as dying at a "good old age" (Judg 8:32), yet Scripture declines to state what that age was, despite noting Joshua's age at

[14]Jehoiada, who attained the astonishing age of 130, is the only exception (2 Chr 24:15). That this lifespan was quite out of the ordinary at that time is evidenced by the fact that, generations earlier, Barzillai is said to have been, at age 80, "a very aged man" (2 Sam 19:32). In respect to chronology, however, Jehoiada must be regarded as an outlier, a lonely, disconnected statistic, living several hundred years outside that unique period from Adam to Joshua where age data are given for every recorded generation. Why his age at death is specifically recorded is a matter of conjecture. The simplest explanation may well be the best: he achieved almost double the normal lifespan (cf. Ps 90:10), his great age recalling a phenomenon of a prior epoch. Eli might appear to be another exception, since Scripture also provides his age at the time of his death. But this information is given not in direct connection with his death (three verses later), but only to make the point that his near-blindness was the result of his being ninety-eight years old (1 Sam 4:15, 18). In every other case where age of death is specifically mentioned, Scripture uses formulae such as "all the days of A were *x* years; and he died," "A died, being *x* years old," "these were the years of A's life; and he died," etc. This is not the case with Eli; the Scripture record simply states: "Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were so dim that he could not see" (1 Sam 4:15). In addition, Scripture provides regnal data in Samuel/Kings/Chronicles that allows calculation of the death ages of a number of kings (all of Judah). The data are calculable from two figures: the age of ascension to the throne, and the number of years' reign. For three of the kings —Solomon, Abijam, and Asa—the age at ascension is not given, making it impossible to know their ages at death. That suggests that the most important detail is in each case the length of the reign rather than the length of life.

[15]We need not be concerned at this point with possible gaps, whether in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies or in the genealogy of Levi through Moses (Exod 6:14–25). The point is that for every generation recorded, an age at death is provided. Occasionally, age at death for two individuals is provided. See nn. 18 and 19 below.

death a few chapters earlier (2:8). The case of Job is even more significant. He clearly lived to an age that places him among the patriarchs (Job 29:7–10; 30:1; 42:16). After the period of his testing was over, Scripture records that he lived another 140 years. He must therefore have attained an age well beyond that of Abraham and even that of Abraham's father. Yet in the very next verse, his death is stated, without recording his age.

What are we to make of these facts? Certainly, they are not self-interpreting. But the following summary and observations seem reasonable. First, Scripture demonstrates a particular interest in spotlighting extraordinary longevity. Second, death figures for ages less than a century are never directly recorded. Third, age-at-death records begin in the chronogenealogies of Gen 5 and 11, but continue immediately, generation by generation, in the ensuing narratives.[16] Fourth, interest in recording age at death ceases with Joshua—Jehoiada, several centuries later, being the sole exception. Fifth, given this context, Scripture's studied avoidance of stating Job's age at death, despite his doubtless longevity and despite presenting chronological information concerning his age in the verse immediately prior to his death record, is striking.[17] This fact, in combination with the preceding observations, suggests that details of longevity are intended to be exclusively identified with the period that spans Adam to Joshua. Thus, in their commonality, those consecutive generations constitute a unit.

During this period, as already stated, an age-at-death statistic is provided for every generation for which there is a record. Even in the detailed narrative material that covers the period from Abraham through Joshua, for the most part, only one death statistic per generation is provided.[18] The focus upon just one individual for statistical purposes is strikingly observed in the branching Levitical genealogy of Exod 6:14–25. This passage details the immediate families of "Reuben, the firstborn of Israel," of Simeon, and then of the four recorded generations from Levi to Moses, including Aaron and his children. Of the forty names included in the pericope, the age at death is given for just three: Levi, Kohath, and Amram—the named ancestors of Moses. Why only these three? True, Levi and Kohath are more significant in the prior and ensuing narratives than most of the others; but that is not the case for Amram, whose name is never mentioned outside of a genealogy. Why no age data for Reuben and Simeon, or Kohath's two brothers Gershon and Merari? Why is the age data for successive generations only—that is, linear and not branching?

[16]This occurs both in the narrative following the Gen 5 genealogy (with the death of Noah; Gen 9:29) and in the narrative following the Gen 11 genealogy.

[17]Job is the only individual in the Bible whom we know to be a centenarian yet whose age at death is not noted. It is a very significant exception in light of the argument being advanced here.

[18]There are four exceptions (as can be seen from the following list in the main text): Abraham/Sarah, Isaac/Ishmael, Joseph/Levi, and Moses/Aaron. These exceptions will be considered in the following section, "The 'Extra' Names in the Parageneology."

The net effect of this selectivity (in Exod 6) is that the recording of age-at-death data for Abraham's consecutive descendants in Genesis is continued in Exodus. Where the godly line in Genesis finishes with Joseph, the Exodus genealogy takes a sideways step and continues through the line of Levi, another son of Israel. The data from both books, pared of the narrative details, can be tabulated as follows:

Table 1. Ages at death for the generations from Abraham to Joshua

Abraham/Sarah	175/127	
Isaac	180	(Ishmael, 137)
Jacob	147	
Joseph/Levi	110/137	
Kohath	133	
Amram	137	
Aaron/Moses	123/120	
Joshua	110	

Note: Biblical references for the data are as follows. Abraham: Gen 25:7. Sarah: Gen 23:1. Isaac: Gen 35:28. Jacob: Gen 47:28. Joseph: Gen 50:26. Levi: Exod 6:16. Kohath: Exod 6:18. Amram: Exod 6:20. Aaron: Num 33:39. Moses: Deut 34:7. Joshua: Josh 24:29 and Judg 2:8. Joshua was not a direct descendant of either Aaron or Moses. Nevertheless, age-wise, he was one generation removed from Moses (Josh 14:7, 10 cf. Exod 7:7); certainly, as Moses's successor, the godly line is seen to continue in him rather than in either of Moses's children (who play no part in the narrative).

From nowhere else in Scripture is it possible to represent genealogical material in this way, except for the chronogenealogies of Gen 5 and 11. The similarity between this quasi-genealogical narrative material and the two earlier genealogies, suggested by the common theme of age-at-death and longevity, is reinforced by the existence also of age-at-begetting data for the generations from Abraham to Jacob. The data are given directly in connection with the births of Isaac and Jacob (Gen 21:5; 25:26); in the case of Joseph, it is given indirectly (cf. Gen 41:46 f.; 45:6; 47:9). For the last four generations, no age-at-begetting data are given (on which, see below).

The 'Extra' Names in the Paragenealogy

It may be clearly seen from table 1 that in four of the generations from Abraham to Joshua more than one death statistic is given. That four out of the eight generations should be exceptions to the 'one-per-generation' idea is significant. It is necessary to consider these carefully, for their presence would appear to weaken the claim that the narratives for this period present a continuation of the linear genealogies of Gen 5 and 11. Several factors should be noted.

First, although four out of eight generations are involved, it is really the case that there are four exceptions among many more individuals who might easily have been included (such as Esau, the other ten sons of Jacob, the sons of Moses, the sons of Levi, etc.). This is strikingly apparent in the genealogical material of Exod 6, as already noted.

Second, in three of the four cases (Abraham/Sarah, Joseph/Levi, and Moses/Aaron) the individuals belong to the single godly line. It is, of course, the *godly line* that the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 are exclusively concerned with. Thus, although Scripture records Esau's age at marriage (Gen 26:34), it declines to note his age at death, even though his father's and brother's ages at death are both recorded. While Isaac and Jacob were of the godly line, Esau was not (see Mal 1:2–3).

Third, Ishmael's age at death is recorded, even though he is not of the godly line. Why? It may be that Ishmael's age at death is given because he, too, was an immediate child—indeed, the firstborn—of Abraham, to whom also was the promise that he would be a great nation, blessed by God, made fruitful, and multiplied exceedingly (Gen 17:20). Ishmael is acknowledged by God as the immediate seed of Abraham. It can hardly be coincidental that this firstborn son had twelve sons, as Jacob later did. To no other individual or group outside of God's covenant people were such promises made (cf. 17:21). Ishmael's inclusion seems to be in recognition of his very special privileges in connection with Abraham. Nevertheless, his line, in terms of the paragenealogy, does not continue. And in that fact may lie one further clue to the reason for providing his age at death: as regards the paragenealogy, he is a "dry tree" (Isa 56:3); but his connection nonetheless with the paragenealogy (through the age data) highlights the legitimacy of the true godly line that, through Isaac, does continue. See also n. 62, below.

Fourth, the inclusion of Ishmael as a "dry tree" has a further significance. He is the son of Abraham, the patriarch to whom was given the promise that his descendants would become a "great nation" (Gen 12:2). Yet Ishmael is not the son of promise, despite being the firstborn son of Abraham. For Ishmael was born to the wrong mother (Gal 4:22 f., 30). The son of promise was to come from Sarah. Indeed, as the progenitor of the nation of Israel, Abraham is incomplete without Sarah. The mother of Israel stands alongside her husband as an equal partner in the fulfillment of the covenant promise.[19] Thus, when Abram's name is changed to Abraham, Sarai's is at the same time changed to Sarah (Gen 17:5, 15). As kings would come from Abraham, so they would from Sarah (Gen 17:6, 16).[20] The close identity of husband with wife may be behind Abraham's comment that he, at 100 years of age, was too old to father a child (Gen 17:17). It is a puzzling admission, given that his own father,

[19]For the important insight that Sarah is an equal partner with her husband in terms of the covenant (and beyond the covenant!), I am indebted to Jo Ann Davidson, "Genesis Matriarchs Engage Feminism," *AUSS* 40.2: 170–72; and Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 226–27, 451.

[20]Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 227.

Terah, must have been 135 years old when Abraham was born (cf. Gen 12:4; 11:32). That Abraham himself later fathered several children after the age of 140,[21] and Jacob was well over 90 when he fathered Benjamin,[22] further supports the conclusion that fathering children at 100 years of age was not unheard of. Why, then, did Abraham protest? Perhaps because he identified himself with his wife's inability. She was past the age of childbearing (Gen 18:11, likely meaning that she had reached menopause). Was Abraham being gracious, tenderly accepting his wife's inability as his own? A mere fourteen years earlier, Sarah had entertained no doubts about her husband's procreative ability when she gave him her maid as a concubine (Gen 16:3, 16); it seems unlikely he would have aged noticeably during the interim, given that he was to live a further seventy-five years! Perhaps it was not so much the case that God waited for Abraham to become too old to naturally father children than that he waited for Sarah to pass the age of childbearing. The fulfillment of the covenant promise, then, was related to Abraham's faith that God could give him children through Sarah. The point of all this is that, in some very significant ways, Abraham and Sarah function as one in the narrative. The recording of her age at death, along with her husband's, bears testimony to that fact. Indeed, in no other case is a woman's age at death given in the biblical record.

Fifth, a similar oneness of purpose and function accounts for the recording of both Moses's and Aaron's ages at death. That both should appear in the 'chronogenealogy' is testimony to their inseparable teamwork (see especially Exod 4:16; 7:1; 4:2–5, 28 f.; 7:8, 10 f.; Num 20:2–12; cf. Ps 77:20; 105:26; 106:16) and, perhaps, to the fact that they were both types of Christ (Moses as deliverer and prophet [Rev 15:3; Deut 18:15, 18] and Aaron as high priest). Indeed, there is a 'oneness' about their work that is not seen in any other partnership in Scripture. In one sense, Aaron functioned as Moses; he was Moses's mouth (Exod 4:16). Though it was he who spoke directly to Pharaoh, Scripture usually ascribes the speaking to Moses. In his first communication with God, Moses was directed to throw down his rod which then became a serpent. Yet before Pharaoh it was not Moses, but Aaron, who threw down the rod.[23] Together they went in and out before Pharaoh. In the wilderness, at Kadesh, they sinned together, and they died almost together, in direct consequence of that sin.

Sixth, the case of Joseph/Levi is simply one of stepping sideways in order to continue the line through a different brother. It must be kept in mind that the basic (generic) purpose of the 'paragenealogy' is to trace the godly

[21]Compare Gen 23:1; 17:17; 24:67; 25:20; 25:1–3, 7.

[22]Benjamin's older brother Joseph was born when Jacob was about 91 years old (see references in n. 40, below).

[23]It would seem to have been Aaron's rod (see Exod 7:9–10, 12). In 'training,' Moses had thrown down his rod at God's command (Exod 4:2–4). But when Aaron became Moses's representative and mouthpiece, his own rod assumes the same function as God's miracle-working tool. In this, the close identity between Moses and Aaron is reinforced.

line from Adam down. That godly line, after Abraham, is through Isaac, not his brother Ishmael, and through Jacob, not his brother Esau. "Abraham, Isaac, and Israel" (1 Kgs 18:36) are the 'fathers' of all the members of the nation of Israel. But in the case of Jacob's sons, they together constitute the godly line; any of the sons of that generation is a legitimate name through which to continue the genealogy. That age at death is given for Levi, while not for Reuben and Simeon, even though the latter are mentioned in the same pericope, serves notice that the paragenealogy is being picked up from Joseph and continued through this one brother and his descendants.

The foregoing may now be summarized. Reasonable explanations can be provided to account for the very few 'extra' names in the linear paragenealogy. One (Ishmael) is an anomaly that seems purposeful: as a 'dry tree,' an outsider to the godly line, he does not belong in the paragenealogy. The surprising recording of his age of death is, rather, a comment on the true godly line, serving to highlight the legitimacy of Isaac as the true son of promise and as the one through whom the godly line will continue. Each of the others are paired names: Abraham/Sarah, Joseph/Levi, and Moses/Aaron. Age-at-death data are recorded for both Abraham and Sarah because of their essential unity as progenitors of the nation of Israel. Similarly, Moses and Aaron functioned uniquely as one. Finally, the godly line necessarily loses its strictly lineal nature with the generation of Jacob's children, since any and all of his children constitute that line. Tracing that line, then, can move through any of the children of Israel, depending upon in whom the interest of the narrative lies: in this case, first Joseph, then Levi and his descendants, and finally Joshua—successor of Moses and another from the line of Jacob.

From Adam to Joshua: A Paragenealogy

It is possible to see in all of this, not just a conceptual connection between the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies and the ensuing narrative, but a continuation of those genealogies through the genre of narrative. That this may be so should not be considered strange, since the distinction between narrative and genealogy is, in reality, somewhat blurred at the edges. J. W. Wright affirms 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."[24] He is certainly correct. Indeed, the very first biblical 'genealogy'—that of Cain—is, in form, virtually indistinguishable

[24]"Genealogies," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch,* ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 346. Bill T. Arnold notes, regarding the *toledoth* clauses that recur throughout Genesis, that "while [they] probably originated as introductions to genealogical lists, they are at times used in Genesis to introduce narrative portions as well. Thus Genesis is comprised of two types of materials . . . these might conveniently be termed narrative and numerative texts." See his *Genesis,* New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5. That the *toledoth* clauses introduce both narrative and "numerative" (or, genealogical) texts is indicative of the unity that should be seen to exist in the totality of the Genesis material.

from the narrative that precedes it. The consecutive genealogies of Ishmael and Isaac are each introduced as such (Gen 25:12, 19), yet they are quite different in character: the genealogy of Ishmael lists descendants, with some narrative comment, while that of Isaac is a narrative with minimal genealogical elements.

Kathleen O'Connor goes further in claiming 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."[25] Wright and O'Connor both make valid points. But their observations need to be taken further. For, as I have previously noted, 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.[26]

What at first glance appear to be unconnected genealogical and chronological elements are, in reality, part of a single, overarching genealogy—a paragenealogy—unified thematically by this idea of a godly line, and technically by the details of age and chronology.[27] Scripture thus presents us with a distinct period defined by a single, unbroken genealogy that begins with Adam and ends with Joshua.[28]

[25]Kathleen M. O'Connor, "Genesis, Book of," *NIDB* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007) 2:542.

[26]White, "Genesis 5 and 11," 273 n. 45. I am indebted to Gordon J. Wenham for the observation that Adam, like Noah and Terah, fathered three named sons (*Genesis 1–15*, 248).

[27]Robert B. Robinson is one who has observed an interplay between the various Genesis genealogies and the narrative material ("Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis," *CBQ* 48 [1986], 595–608). In a footnote, Robinson cites those who (incorrectly, in his view) "consider the genealogies to be condensations of the narrative material [as Gunkel] . . . or the narratives to be expansions of the genealogies [von Rad]." These "force the genealogy-narrative relationship to move in one direction only and thus rule out from the beginning a truly productive reciprocal interplay" (603 n. 15). Robinson's concern, in contrast to that being advanced here, is to portray "the delicate interplay between the narratives and the nonnarrative genealogies" (608) in a literary relationship that highlights points of commonality and contrast and of the tension between free will and determinism (or contingency and foreordination). Nevertheless, Robinson's paper highlights a connection between the genealogical and narrative material that sits well with the concept of paragenealogy being proposed here.

[28]Even if one were to suggest gaps in the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 and Exod 6 (and many do), such gaps would not affect the existence of the paragenealogy. For the point is that, for every generation that Scripture records in the godly line from Adam to Joseph, the unique set of chronological data (age at death and age at begetting) are present. For the generations from Levi (from the same generation as Joseph) to Moses, age at death alone is given. Because of the presence of such chronological data, there

The Essential Unity of Genealogy and Narrative

In its huge span over several biblical books, the paragenealogy moves through genealogies and narratives, and from a period of prehistory into a period where verifiable historical records begin to appear. The way in which the paragenealogy relates to these requires some elucidation.

It has become commonplace for theologians to divide Genesis into two, with the division at the end of chapter 11. It is often suggested that the period prior to Abraham be regarded as "primeval history" or "prehistory."[29] The considerable extra detail provided with the story of Abraham (the narrative "slows down") is supposedly indicative of the firmer historicity of this period. It is true that the narrative slows down with Abraham. It is also doubtless true that historical records become less secure the further back in history we move. But these are hardly compelling reasons to regard Genesis 12 and onwards as more historical than the preceding chapters.[30] The narrative from Genesis 12 slows down because there are details that are considered important for the overall Genesis story. Nor do the preceding chapters proceed at a uniform pace; one may observe an ebb and flow of narrative detail from the very first chapter of Genesis.[31] What is important to notice is that, in connection with tracing the godly line, the slowing down or speeding up of the story

---

is a uniqueness, a distinctness, a unity, and a continuity to this period, regardless of supposed gaps.

[29]Arnold, *Genesis*, 1–2; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 11; Collins, *Adam and Eve*, 57–59. Being regarded as primeval history or prehistory, the historical integrity of the biblical record before the time of Abraham is held in suspicion, even by some evangelical scholars. Denis O. Lamoureux represents one end of the evangelical position when he states that "real history in the Bible begins roughly around Genesis 12 with Abraham" ("No Historical Adam: Evolutionary Creation View," in *Four Views on The Historical Adam*, ed. Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013], 44). More extreme is evangelical Peter Enns, who is skeptical of the historicity of the biblical narratives even until the time of the monarchy. For the monarchic period, he claims, there is at least some extrabiblical evidence, while such evidence is lacking for the "primeval and ancestral stories" (*Inspiration and Incarnation* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005], 43). More moderate views, such as that held by Collins, recognize elements of factual historicity in the earlier chapters while accepting the basic "prehistory" designation for the pre-Abrahamic period.

[30]Several reasons may be advanced for this denial. But my concern here is only to make the single point that follows, and to relate that point to the paragenealogy.

[31]For example, consider how taut the 'narrative' of Gen 1 is compared with the following three chapters, where the narrative slows down to describe events in detail. In Gen 5, by contrast, it is evidently not considered important that we know anything more about the several generations between Adam and Noah except for their names, their age at the birth of a particular named son, and their age at death. The 'story' speeds up for that period, though it slows slightly with Enoch, certain details of his life being considered important enough to record, and similarly with Lamech.

determines whether it is presented as narrative or as genealogy. This point is crucial, and needs clarification.

We must first recall Wright's comment that "genealogies can take narrative form, and narrative-like expansions do appear within the biblical genealogies" (see n. 24, above). But we may go further and note that the two major genealogies (Gen 5 and 11) share with the major narratives in Genesis the same broad function: to trace the godly line. It is simply the question of detail that determines whether the 'story' is presented in its bare bones as genealogy (names—generation by generation—with little or no narrative detail) or fleshed out as narrative (names—generation by generation—with considerable detail).[32] Thus, Genesis presents the account of Adam and Eve and their immediate children, the Gen 5 genealogy, the Noah narrative, the Gen 11 genealogy, and the narratives from Terah through Joseph.[33] These alternating narratives and genealogies constitute a single, connected storyline.[34] They should be seen as a unit.

The unity of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies with the surrounding narrative material is evidenced in two further ways. The first is that the Gen 5 genealogy actually makes a 'false start' as narrative in the last verses of the previous chapter.[35] This has the effect of calling attention to the fact that the genealogy

[32]Bill T. Arnold likens the relationship between genealogy and narrative in Genesis to watching a DVD. "The genealogies," he suggests, "are times when we 'fast-forward' through the story . . . except on occasions when the editor slows down enough to highlight certain particular features . . . . The narratives, by contrast, move along at a deliberate pace—at times even in 'slow motion'—because the details of the narrative are so important" (*Genesis*, 6).

[33]Robert B. Robinson has noted that "the genealogies of the Book of Genesis suffer by comparison with the narratives in which they are embedded" ("Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis," *CBQ* 48 [1986], 595). Comparing genealogies to medieval annals in their focus on "fundamental realities" (597), he eloquently expresses how genealogy may stand alongside narrative as a complementary record of history. "As in the annals, the minimalism of the genealogies is not a failed effort to narrate the complexity and drama of existence. The genealogies are a fitting expression of the continuity of fundamental elements of human life: birth, death, the continuation of the family line. Even when the genealogies interact with the narratives, as they constantly do in Genesis, the genealogies maintain this sense of organic, elemental process" (598).

[34]There are, of course, other genealogies in Genesis besides those of chapters 5 and 11. Why are the latter singled out here for special treatment? It is because the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies are an essential part of 'the story' in a way that the genealogies of, say, Nahor (Gen 22:20–24), Ishmael (Gen 25:12–18), and Esau (Gen 36) are not. The latter concern individuals who are not part of the "godly line" that Genesis traces from Adam through Noah, then through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These minor genealogies have a close connection with the main story of Genesis; but the family lines they describe are nevertheless outside of that single, godly line.

[35]Scripture records that after the birth of Enosh "men began to call on the name of the Lord" (Gen 4:26). That statement comes at the end of the truncated, three-

to follow is really part of that narrative—a continuation, but without the detail.[36] Similarly, the Gen 11 genealogy begins with a backward glance to the preceding narrative by commencing with the words, "Two years after the flood" (Gen 11:10). A second indicator of unity is that the chronological data of the two genealogies are continued in the narratives that follow each of them. So Noah's age at death, missing from the genealogy, is inserted in the narrative (Gen 9:28–29); and in the narratives following the Gen 11 genealogy, the chronological interest in age at begetting and age at death continues.[37] These two evidences of unity are symmetrical. Both chronogenealogies first move backward to pick up the thread of the story from the preceding narratives. And both chronogenealogies project their chronological interest forward into the following narratives. This dual movement is shown in table 2.

It is this essential unity of genealogy and narrative in Genesis, and the means by which that unity is established, that allows us to speak of a *parageneal*ogy. It is not so much that Genesis contains genealogies as that the entire book of Genesis is itself a genealogy: it is a chronological record of God's people generation by generation. The details of the record are sparse in places, much fuller in others, but it is a single, unified record.[38]

---

generation narrative-genealogy of Gen 4:25–26 (Adam—Seth—Enosh). With this statement, the narrative-genealogy halts, then starts over again as pure genealogy from Adam in the following chapter. By presenting the first three generations, then stating a theme, then recommencing the genealogy, a definite connection is made between that theme and the genealogy: the former is embraced by the latter. This first chronogenealogy (Gen 5) thus has as its thematic intent to trace the line of the godly—those who "call[ed] on the name of the Lord." It is consequently highly significant that the expression next occurs very early in the Abraham narrative, when it is stated that Abraham "called on the name of the Lord" (Gen 12:8). The repetition of this expression provides further testimony to the unity of the chronogenealogies and the narratives.

[36]Johnson, following B. Jacob, suggests simply that "the passage serves as a transition between the Cain narrative and the Sethite genealogy (*Biblical Genealogies*, 8). Perhaps it does. But regarding this transition we must note: (1) it includes three generations, and the succeeding genealogy begins again with the first; (2) the first three generations of the Gen 5 genealogy are, in the "transition," given in the context of a narrative; and (3) the transition concludes with the unexpected remark that "then men began to call on the name of the Lord." Who are these men? They are those listed in the following genealogy. Thus, two elements of the narrative—the names Adam, Seth, and Enosh, and the devotional nature of those men—are taken up in the genealogy. Narrative and genealogy here share a common purpose.

[37]This chronological thread is not a feature of the 'other' Genesis genealogies, providing further support for the contention that the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies are distinct from the other minor genealogies in Genesis and, at the same time, are one with the major narratives.

[38]I am aware that traditional critical scholarship (and some evangelical scholarship more recently) tends to understand Genesis as presenting two distinct creation stories in its opening chapters. This would weaken the concept of "a single, unified record." I am not interested here in treating upon that question. Whatever one's position on

Table 2. Connections between narratives and genealogies in Genesis

A. Genealogies pick up threads from the preceding narrative.			
Narrative	← Genealogy	Narrative	← Genealogy
(Gen 4:25 f.)	(Gen 5:1–6)	(Gen 9:28)	(Gen 11:10)
B. Genealogies project their chronological interest forward to the following narrative.			
Genealogy →	Narrative	Genealogy →	Narrative
(Gen 5:32)	(Gen 9:28 f.)	(Gen 11:27)	(Gen 12:5, 25:7)

Paragenealogy Characterized by Decreasing Chronological Tautness

It is interesting to observe that this paragenealogy becomes increasingly diffuse as it progresses. The first hint of this is seen in Gen 11, where the numerical formula is missing the third item that is consistently present in the Gen 5 genealogy.[39] Later, a dead-end offshoot is included in the person of Ishmael (as noted earlier). An age-at-begetting datum is supplied only indirectly for Joseph, while not at all for the few remaining generations (Levi to Joshua).[40] The strictly lineal nature of the progression through the generations is disturbed by the lateral movement from Joseph to Levi. A branching element is introduced by including two brothers, Aaron and Moses, in the second-to-last generation.[41] Finally, the movement from Moses to Joshua in the final generation is not one of biological descent; it is still, significantly, a movement from one generation to the next, but this is discernible only by comparing

that issue, the important point for the present argument is that Genesis returns, in the genealogy of chapter 5, to the 'beginning,' employing language clearly reminiscent of the opening chapter (Gen 5:1–2, cf. 1:27–28). The narrative having moved from Adam to the story of his first children and then to the birth of his grandson, the genealogy then moves backwards in the story and starts over again with this first man. While, technically speaking, the paragenealogy commences in Gen 5, the story it encompasses begins from the beginning and continues through to the final chapter. It is in this sense (at least) that one may speak of the entire book of Genesis being "a single, unified record."

[39]The Gen 5 three-fold formula (somewhat simplified) reads: "A lived *x* years and begot B. After he begot B, A lived *y* years. So all the days of A were *z* years." The Gen 11 formula reads: "A lived *x* years and begot B. After he begot B, A lived *y* years."

[40]By comparing Gen 41:46, 29 f., 53 f.; 45:6; and 47:9, it is possible to ascertain that Jacob was around 91 when Joseph was born.

[41]However, as noted earlier, there's an important sense in which Moses and Aaron may be considered as one (see section "The 'Extra' Names in the Paragenealogy," above).

unconnected texts (Josh 14:7, 10, cf. Exod 7:7).[42] This increasing diffusiveness of the paragenealogy is easily seen when the data are tabulated.

Table 3. Increasing diffuseness of the paragenealogy through the generations

Genealogical element	Adam to Noah	Shem to Terah	Abram to Joseph	Levi to Joshua
Three-fold formula	1, 2, 3	1, 2, –	–	–
Age at begetting	Yes	Yes	Yes (Joseph implied)	–
Age at death	Yes	Yes (implied)	Yes	Yes
One name per generation	Yes	Yes	–	–
Strictly linear	Yes	Yes	Yes	–
Total scores	10	8	5	2

Note: Criteria are scored as follows: Complete/unqualified yes = 2; qualified yes = 1; no (–) = 0.

The net effect of this decreasing tightness of the genealogical elements is twofold. First, the possibility of establishing a chronology from the material in the paragenealogy becomes increasingly difficult, and ultimately impossible. This is because the crucial data for establishing a chronology through the paragenealogy is the age-at-begetting data. For Joseph's birth, this datum is only implied (see n. 40, above). It is completely absent for the generations from Levi to Moses, while it is not applicable for the final generation, since Joshua was not a son of Moses.[43]

[42]And it is still tracing the godly line through the family of Jacob (Israel).

[43]The biblical evidence suggests, however, that Joshua was one generation removed from Moses. While the children of Israel were still encamped at Sinai, when Moses would have been around 80 or 81, Joshua is said to have been "a young man" (Exod 33:11). Exactly what the age difference was between these two is not important. Conceptually, at least, it is a generation, as the 'torch' of leadership passed from one individual to another.

A second effect is closely related to the first. The decreasing chronological value of the parageneology in its final generations quite naturally highlights the greater chronological value and intent of the parageneology in its earlier generations. That chronological intent seems to grow stronger as one works backward from Joshua toward Adam. It is in the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 that the chronological data are most blatant, most complete, and most accessible. Yet many commentators ascribe little value to the chronological data of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies. Whatever reasons drive that assessment, such reasons cannot arise from the text itself. Instead, the textual data point in quite the opposite direction. The increasing diffuseness of the parageneology may be interpreted as expressly designed to direct attention to the chronological intention of the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11.

Parageneology Characterized by Beginning and Ending Markers

The death of Joshua, along with his age, is recorded twice (Josh 24:29; Judg 2:8). Of no other in the parageneology is this the case. Is it mere coincidence that this double reference occurs only with the final name? It might be suggested that this restatement of Joshua's death (Judg 2:8) simply functions in the narrative as a bridge between Israel's incomplete conquest of the land, even during Joshua's life, and the increased unfaithfulness that occurs after the great leader's death: it has nothing to do with a parageneology. But this seems inadequate. The book of Joshua begins by restating, almost in passing, the fact of Moses's death, previously recorded in the final chapter of Deuteronomy (Josh 1:1–2; Deut 34:5–7). Yet his age at death is not repeated. Indeed, a very similar bridging comment occurs at the beginning of Judges, when passing reference to Joshua's death sets the scene for what follows. Here, too, there is no accompanying reference to age. But in Judg 2:8 the original record of Joshua's death is repeated using (in the MT) exactly the same words from Josh 24:29. It is not a passing reference to something that has already been recorded. Rather, it is a complete restatement of a previous record; in this case, a record of death and age at death. This is quite singular. From the perspective of the parageneology, it is significant. As a double bar line written at the end of a musical score marks the completion of that work, so the double account of Joshua's death record announces the conclusion of the parageneology.

We may recall that the parageneology also begins twice: there is the 'false start' in the final two verses of Gen 4 and then the real start at the beginning of the following chapter. The double beginning and double ending firmly establish the boundaries of the parageneology. Its beginning is clearly defined, as is its ending.

The Parageneology and Chronology

Twenty-seven generations are represented in the parageneology that spans the period from Adam to Joshua. Connective chronological data accompany each generation from Adam to Jacob; additional data from other biblical passages allow broad chronological computations for the period from Abraham to Joshua. That numerical data is contained in the early genealogical material is

beyond dispute. But the pressing question remains: Is that numerical data of any chronological value?

I have broached that question elsewhere and suggested a number of exegetical reasons why the numerical data of Gen 5 and 11 should be seen as intending to establish a chronology.[44] Here, I wish to consider the question simply from the perspective of the parageneaology as a unified entity.

The intimate connection between the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies and the narratives is the foundational perspective from which to approach this question. From the time of Abraham, the narrative moves from generation to generation, carefully providing age at death for each patriarch and age at begetting for each generation. Both sets of numbers establish a conceptual connection with the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11; the second set, in addition, allows the construction of a chronology. If the basic historicity of the Abraham to Joseph narrative is accepted, it would seem necessary to accept also the integrity of the numerical data for those same generations: so Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born, and died at age 175; Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born, and died at age 180, etc.[45] Yet even within the community of conservative evangelicals, there seems to be a growing number who decline to ascribe the same chronological value to the numerical data of Gen 5 and 11.[46] Why might this be so? There would seem to be two primary reasons.

[44]White, "Genesis 5 and 11," 253–77.

[45]Michael L. Rosenzweig, somewhat exceptionally, accepts the historicity of the patriarchal narratives while at the same time noting difficulties with the numerical data. Yet it is not that he rejects the data; rather, he believes the age data need, in each case, to be halved. Offering lexical and cultural evidence, he puts forward the suggestion that "at least from Abraham's time to the time of Joshua, Hebrews probably kept track of their lives in periods of six months called shanim" ("Life History Data in the Bible, from Abraham to Joshua," *Judaism* 29.3 [1980]: 359). Understanding "years" to mean "half years" makes it easier, he claims, to fit the biblical ages "into the general tapestry of human life with which we are familiar" (357). Thus, Abraham was only 50 years old (100 half years) when he begat Isaac; Isaac was 30 years old (60 half years) when he begat Esau and Jacob; etc. The lifespans would similarly be halved. Whether or not Rosenzweig's hypothesis has validity, he at least takes the age data seriously. Moreover, were his suggestion to be proven correct, one would still have the data necessary for a chronology, though a compressed one. Indeed, this is precisely what Rosenzweig attempts, concluding that "Abraham was born toward the end of the 16th century BCE" (358).

[46]Evidence supporting this assertion is to be found in the many recent evangelical publications where scholars debate the issue of origins. See, for example: Charles Halton, ed., *Genesis: History, Fact, or Neither? Three Views on the Bible's Earliest Chapters*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015); John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2015); Gordon J. Wenham, *Rethinking Genesis 1–11: Gateway to the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015); Barrett and Caneday, eds., *Four Views on The Historical Adam*; J. Daryl Charles, ed., *Reading Genesis 1–2: An Evangelical Conversation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013); Peter Enns, *The*

The first, most obviously, is that the scientific and archaeological evidence appears irreconcilable with the biblical data of those two chapters. Such evidence is commonly understood to demonstrate that not only has life existed on earth for millions of years, but human civilization itself began earlier than a traditional biblical chronology would allow. It is possible to interpret Gen 1 and 2 in various ways that allow a degree of harmonization with the evolutionary paradigm and mainstream historical timeline; but all attempts to do similarly with the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies depend ultimately upon finding some way to show that the biblical data cannot mean what they very clearly appear to mean. If one comes to the Scriptures with the prior understanding that the scientific and archaeological evidence must be accepted, one really has no option but to either (1) accept the chronological evidence of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies at face value, yet deny its truthfulness; (2) attempt to demonstrate that the tight connections of the numerical data from generation to generation do not preclude the possibility of generational gaps[47]; or (3) simply ignore the genealogies altogether. Whichever option is followed, the extrabiblical evidence appears powerfully influential in forcing a re-evaluation of the biblical material.

The second reason why many scholars dismiss the chronological implications of the genealogical data is theological, and relates to the sense that genealogies are a genre quite distinct from historical narrative.[48] But,

Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2012); Johnny V. Miller and John M. Soden, *In the Beginning ... We Misunderstood: Interpreting Genesis 1 in Its Original Context* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012); C. John Collins, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); 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: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

[47]Some have attempted to avoid the demands of the numerical data by focusing on the names in these genealogies. It is suggested that "A lived *x* years, and begot B" really means "A lived *x* years, and begot someone in the line of descent that led to B." Linguistically, the suggestion lacks any biblical support. Note Hasel's study of the Hebrew verb *yalad* (to give birth/beget) in "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. Furthermore, the "line of descent" suggestion fails the pragmatic exegetical test: When applied to every generation, it simply doesn't work (see my "Genesis 5 and 11," 263–64 n. 32 for a fuller argument). Yet the suggestion is itself tacit admission that the interlocking structure of the numerical elements simply does not encourage the bald assertion that there are generational gaps.

[48]For many scholars, especially those from the liberal tradition, there is the quite different perspective that emerges from understanding Genesis as the product of various editorial sources. The Wellhausian 'documentary hypothesis' suggests four primary sources, known together as J-E-D-P. The last of these, the 'Priestly' source, is assigned by scholars to the time of the Exile and said to be responsible for producing

as I have already argued here, this is not really the case. A genealogy differs from historical narrative chiefly in that it has a narrower focus (biological succession—one aspect of history) and less detail (a concentration on names rather than on events and places).[49] Failure to recognize this, and accepting instead a sharp dichotomy between the two genres encourages exegetical inconsistency. Specifically, the Genesis narrative from Abraham forward provides names of fathers and sons, and of the ages of the fathers at the birth of their sons. Direct biological succession is, in every case, assumed without question by biblical scholars. The narrative text can hardly be otherwise understood. The genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 likewise provide names of fathers

---

the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11. See R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1987), 21; David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 339; Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 16–18; Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 67. If the 'hypothesis' is correct in its basic assumption, it becomes very difficult to speak of a narrative that has an overarching purpose, much less of a unified document. A chief weakness of the Wellhausian idea, however, is that it is no longer possible to know with any degree of certainty just how Genesis was put together, if it was 'put together' at all. The supposed sources are postulations only, even if based on rigorous analysis of the text. Yet it is only a single text—the book of Genesis itself—that we now possess (see Carr, *Fractures of Genesis*, 5); on hermeneutical grounds, therefore, a strong argument exists for interpreting Genesis from the perspective of its being a unified document. That is the approach adopted here.

[49]This is particularly true of descending genealogies. Whether a biblical genealogy is written as ascending (moving backward from son to father) or descending (moving forward from father to son) is not haphazard. The ascending genealogy is concerned with tracing roots (Ezra 7:1–5; Luke 3:23–38), while the descending genealogy traces the march of history as it occurs within a particular family or line (Matt 1:2–16). This is why branching (or segmented) genealogies, where siblings are mentioned, are always descending genealogies. They relate what happened with the passage of time. Ascending genealogies, on the other hand, are only interested in tracing roots; thus they only ever give one name per generation, sufficient information to follow the line backwards. So, it makes sense to say that Luke, in giving his genealogy of Jesus, wished to show that Jesus really was "the son of God" as suggested by the theophanic pronouncement at his baptism (which, in Luke's gospel, is placed immediately before the genealogical record; see Luke 3:21–22 and n. 5, above). If that is indeed the purpose of his genealogy, then that purpose is best served by the ascending form. Matthew, on the other hand, moves the genealogy forward in time, moving with and not against the flow of history. His purpose is evidently to highlight God's hand in history showing that despite the vicissitudes of human events, the sin and the failure, despite even the cancellation of the monarchy, from that same royal line the promised Son of David was born. In the descending form, genealogies serve to provide a highly compact record of the march of history under God's guiding hand.

and sons and contain the same type of connective numerical data.[50] Is it not inconsistent then to suggest that these need not be regarded as presenting direct biological succession? Is genealogy to be thought of as a unique genre to which the usual rules of grammar and logic need not apply? The historical picture provided by these genealogies is skeletal; but can the mere lack of narrative detail be the excuse to distort the shape and length of the skeletal structure?

The paragenealogy, by its existence, focuses attention on the unity of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies and the subsequent narratives. These share a common purpose and a common chronological intention and integrity. Both proclaim God's unchanging purpose in the face of sin, that being to have a people on earth who call on the name of the Lord (cf. Gen 4:26 and 12:8). The genealogies highlight the fact that in every generation, God's name is represented on the earth. The narrative of Noah, which emerges from the first genealogy, highlights the fact that in any generation, even the most wicked, may be found one who will yet call on the name of the Lord. In no generation, since Creation and the Fall, has this divine purpose been defeated. The genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 bear testimony to that simple idea. It is one reason why positing gaps in these genealogies is not only unacceptable exegetically, but inadequate theologically.

Implications and Conclusion

The selectivity of the biblical data relating to age at death is striking. Scripture's recording of the data for a limited number of the biblical characters is not haphazard. The non-random nature of the phenomenon must be accounted for. Analysis of the phenomenon exposes a paragenealogy that seems to have gone unrecognized in the scholarly literature.[51] The paragenealogy spans—and to a large extent, defines and unifies—a single biblical period from Adam to Joshua. Theological and chronological implications arise from this observation.

First, the names of Adam and Joshua are typologically suggestive, particularly when considered as starting and ending points. It was Adam who (unwittingly) led God's first children out of paradise; it was Joshua's lifework to lead them into Canaan, the land where God would establish his name and where His presence would abide. In this, Joshua, as his name suggests, is a type of Christ, the Savior of His people and the One who will bring them into paradise.[52] Typologically, God's purpose in establishing a godly line—a people

[50]With the additional mention of the remaining years of the father after the birth of his son in Gen 5.

[51]The presence of the numerical data itself has long been recognized, of course, and frequently appears in biblical chronological charts. What appears not to have been recognized is (1) the surprising selectivity of the data, with its confinement (essentially) to a single period of biblical history, (2) the unity of the genealogical and narrative numerical data for the period spanning Adam to Joshua, and (3) the theological implications of this material.

[52]The first part of Joshua's name is a shortened form of the divine name 'Lord' (Heb. *yhwh*); the second part is the Hebrew word for 'salvation.' Thus the name 'Joshua'

who call on the name of the Lord—reaches its resolution when His people are brought into the promised land. The paragenealogy highlights this typology, not only by defining the beginning and ending points of this period, but in doing so through the element of death.[53] For with Joshua's death, Scripture's seeming fixation on age at death—the relentless reminder of mortality and of the decreasing lifespan resulting from humanity's expulsion from Eden—essentially ceases. And when the One prefigured by Joshua completes His work, death will be swallowed up in victory, and mortality will yield to immortality (1 Cor 15:54).

A closely related theological implication is that the paragenealogy witnesses to God's fixed determination to have a godly people on this earth. This broad concept is not new. C. John Collins, for example, in speaking of the "new starts" in Noah, Abraham, and Israel,[54] is in effect suggesting something similar. By dint of its span from Adam to Joshua, and the typology so signified, the paragenealogy powerfully demonstrates that God will continue to work in the human race until a paradise for his people is regained. Whether in the genealogies of chapters 5 and 11, or in the narratives that precede and follow them, the entire book of Genesis (and beyond) is concerned with this unswerving divine purpose.

This leads naturally to a third implication. The paragenealogy unifies two periods that scholars have often considered somewhat distinct: the prehistorical (or primeval, protohistorical) period before Abraham, and the period from Abraham forward. It is, of course, quite legitimate to divide history into periods, while recognizing that there will not always be agreement as to precisely where the divisions might lie.[55] But the characterization of the period before Abraham as primeval, that it is not historical in the same sense as that which follows, should be rejected as unbiblical and prejudicial. It is unbiblical because there are no obvious textual reasons to distinguish the material of Gen 1–11 from that of the later chapters in terms of either genre, authorial intention, or broad theme.[56] On the contrary, the Abraham

---

means 'The Lord is salvation' (Richard S. Hess, *Joshua*, TOTC (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 17; Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 3.

[53]Age at death is the only element of the paragenealogy that is consistently present for every generation (as may be easily seen from table 2).

[54]See n. 57, below.

[55]"History," as Heath White pointedly states, "doesn't come with sharp edges" (*Post-Modernism 101* [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006], 12).

[56]This is not to say that we may not, for the sake of convenience, so divide Genesis in order to consider the periods before and after which the nation of Israel had its origin. Collins, referring to R. W. L. Moberly, acknowledges that there is no grammatical shift between Gen 1–11 and the rest of Genesis. Nevertheless, he suggests that "an attentive reader intuitively sees a transition between Genesis 1–11 and the rest of Genesis" ("A Historical Adam: Old-Earth Creation View," in *Historical Adam*, 148). Perhaps she might. But she would also observe that the transition is neither sudden

narrative emerges from the preceding genealogical material in the same way that the Noah narrative emerges from the genealogy of Gen 5.[57] The Abraham story marks a new phase in God's work with the human race, but that fact in no way implies a disjunction with what has gone before. A new phase it may be, but it is simply the next phase in a divinely-ordered process that can be traced back at least to the birth of Enosh.[58]

The characterization of the pre-Abrahamic period as prehistory is not only unbiblical, it is also prejudicial, because it pre-judges that part of the biblical record as unhistorical: Since secular and extrabiblical historical records for the period are either absent or insecure or mythical in nature, the biblical data for the corresponding period cannot be accepted as truly historical. This is a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' that is unwarranted. The fact that no other record exists for the events described in the early chapters of Genesis, no extrabiblical text with which to correlate and confirm these events, is not in itself grounds for discounting the historical value of the Genesis record. We are not at liberty to deny God the right to provide in his Word a brief record of the early period of earth's history in the absence of any other record. It may well be that, from the perspective of the divine Revelator, a true account of this period is necessitated by that very lack. The paragenealogy spans both the "prehistorical" and historical eras. The God whose eyes "run to and fro throughout the whole earth" (2 Chr 16:9) "neither slumbers nor sleeps" (Ps 121:4) at any stage in history. The divine "Watcher" (Dan 4:13), the "faithful witness" (Rev 1:5), has ensured a written testimony of the foundational stories of humanity's beginnings, of the origins of sin and death, and of the great

(notice the links between the final section of Gen 11 and the first verses of Gen 12) nor unique (there are transitions between Gen 5 and 6, between Gen 9 and 10, and between Gen 10 and 11). Granted, from Gen 12 the narrative 'settles down' to focus on the patriarchs of the Jewish people, to recount in some detail crucial events in the formation of a chosen, covenant people. But this is irrelevant to matters of historicity and facticity, which depend less upon subject matter or degree of detail than upon the veracity, integrity, and use of the sources.

[57]See my "Genesis 5 and 11," 270–74. While Collins is happy to regard Gen 1–11 as a distinct literary unit that deals with prehistory, he also recognizes a thematic unity between the earlier and later chapters. For example, both Noah and Abram (and Israel) are "new Adams"; through them, God makes "new starts" after Adam and Eve (C. John Collins, "Adam and Eve in the Old Testament," in *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, ed. Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014], 7). This is evidenced by the recurrent references to blessing, multiplying, and being fruitful (Gen 1:28; 9:1; 12:2–3; 17:20; 26:3–4; 28:3; 48:3–4; Exod 1:7) (ibid., 6).

[58]As stated in n. 37, above, the first chronogenealogy (Gen 5) begins the process of tracing the line of the godly—those who "call on the name of the Lord." The phrase is repeated very early in the Abraham narrative, when it is stated that Abraham "called on the name of the Lord" (Gen 12:8). This link provides testimony to the unity not only of the chronogenealogies and the narratives but also of the first eleven chapters and the remaining chapters of Genesis.

Flood that prefigured the certainty of the final destruction of sinners from the earth.

A fourth implication of the existence of the paragenealogy emerges from the previous. Chronological data are closely tied to historical records. The paucity or absence of secure records for the beginning of the second millennium BC and earlier is accompanied by a scarcity of reliable chronological data for the same period. But it is precisely for this ancient period that the chronological data, as found in the paragenealogy, are clear, connected, concise, and consistent. No other numerical data are required to establish a basic chronology. The increasing diffuseness of the chronological elements of the paragenealogy in its later stages does not negatively impact a broad biblical chronology, because Scripture provides the necessary data elsewhere;[59] on the contrary, the diffuseness of the later stages of the paragenealogy highlights the greater value of the chronological data in its earliest stages.

Indeed, the data as we have them in Genesis, Exodus, and Joshua seem to be presented and organized with the very purpose of directing attention to the chronological completeness of the early portions of the paragenealogy. It is, of course, possible to discount the chronological purpose and integrity of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies. But any such conception is brought to the text; it does not arise, primarily, from anything present in the text itself.[60] Rather, the text resists such an a priori conclusion and points in quite the opposite direction. The temptation to dismiss the chronological value of the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 sits uneasily with the evident existence of a paragenealogy that both exhibits a unified chronological emphasis and accords particular chronological value to its earliest generations.

A fifth, and final, implication follows from the preceding. It may be framed as a question: How are we to account for such an apparent unity of purpose as is suggested by the paragenealogy? That the age data are confined to one period (with the sole exception of Jehoiada); that the recording of age data ceases around the time lifespans of more than a century ceased to be the

[59]In the paragenealogy, the chronological connections continue only to the death of Joseph. Although longevity continues to be recorded for the generations from Levi to Joshua, age at begetting data are not supplied, making chronological connections impossible. A chronology for this period is possible only through the use of texts that occur outside of the paragenealogy records (for example, Gen 15:13–16; Exod 12:40; 1 Kgs 6:1; Gal 3:17).

[60]Against this, I acknowledge that it is common for scholars to point out the apparent schematization of names and numbers in the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies. The evident patterns suggest that some (if not all) of the data are contrived or reworked for literary or theological purposes. If these suggestions have validity, they create an enormous tension with the patterns that I have presented here, which argue that the text itself demands that the genealogical data be accepted as historically factual. Problematic with aspects of the schematization suggestions, is that they disallow, a priori, the possibility that God himself might have ordered lives and events according to timetables and patterns. This concept, and others relating to the schematization issue, is explored in a forthcoming article.

norm;[61] that all those whose lifespans are directly stated were centenarians; that age-of-death data are recorded for twenty-seven successive generations and then suddenly cease; that these records are confined to a single line;[62] that the death datum for the last, and only the last name in the paragenealogy, is recorded twice; that this double ending echoes the double beginning; that the tautness and detail of the chronological data gradually diminish: all this bespeaks an overarching purpose. But whose purpose?

Were the paragenealogy confined to just one book of the Bible, it could be understood, perhaps, as a unifying literary device created by a single author. But the paragenealogy spans several biblical books.[63] Did it span Genesis to Deuteronomy, a conservative scholar might regard it as the brainchild of the primary author of the Pentateuch: that is, Moses. But the paragenealogy extends into the book of Joshua. Might this, then, be corroborating evidence for the old idea of a Hexateuch?[64] But there are good reasons to be skeptical that there ever was a body of OT books conceived of as a Hexateuch.[65] Besides,

[61]It cannot be known for sure when this occurred. What is known is that, as recorded in Scripture, lifespans decreased rapidly in the first few generations following the Flood, and continued to decrease less dramatically in the subsequent generations, with Joshua dying at just ten years over one hundred. By the time of David, judging from the royal annals, average lifespans seem to have been considerably less than one hundred.

[62]Ishmael seems to be an exception. But, as already noted here, he was indeed of Abraham's line and, in Abraham's mind, was the one through whom the line would continue. For that reason, his lifespan is recorded. But it is as though the paragenealogy then backs up, having revealed a "dry tree." Ishmael's age at death is recorded soon after his father Abraham's (Gen 25:17, 7); but after the record is given for Ishmael, the account immediately returns to Isaac, and does so with a chronological detail—his age at marriage (Gen 25:19–20). One may wonder why this detail is strangely deferred until this moment instead of being supplied with the account of his marriage in the previous chapter (Gen 24:67). Perhaps it is to make the point that we are now back on track, following the true line of the paragenealogy.

[63]The age-at-death data occur in every book from Genesis to Judges, with the exception of Leviticus: six books in total.

[64]Some scholars, following Wellhausen again, have spoken in terms of a Hexateuch rather than a Pentateuch. The proposed six-book unit would comprise the five books of the Pentateuch plus Joshua. See the discussions in Hess, *Joshua*, 31–3; Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 6.

[65]R. K. Harrison summarizes evidence that the idea of a Hexateuch has come under fire from both liberal and conservative scholars. He states: "On the ground that the basic integrity of the Hexateuch has considerably less in its favor than that of the so-called Deuteronomic history [where Joshua is seen to belong to that section of the Jewish canon spanning Joshua to 2 Kings], many liberals have arrived at the conclusion that the 'Hexateuch' is at best an unreal postulate." He notes further that "the Jewish canon made an entirely separate entity of the Pentateuch and placed Joshua and the related historical writings in a different section." Furthermore, "had there been

the paragenealogy really finishes in Judges, for it is there that Joshua's death, and his age at death, is recorded for the second time, bringing finality to the paragenealogy (Judg 2:8).

It does not seem possible to view the paragenealogy as a literary device. But for those scholars who see the hand of God both in the events, institutions, and personalities of Israel's history and in the production of the sacred Scriptures, evidence of overarching unity need not be dependent for its explanation upon particular literary units, nor upon collusion of authorship. The paragenealogy witnesses to a very close divine supervision over the writing of the earliest portions of Scripture. It suggests a God who is concerned not only with people and places, events and institutions, but also with time and chronology.

---

a Hexateuch in existence when the Samaritans limited their scriptural canon to their Pentateuch, it would most certainly have been recognized at that time" (Harrison, "Hexateuch," *ISBE* 2:703). See also the discussion in David M. Howard Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament: Historical Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1993), 75–77.