

# "Primeval Chronology"

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**(1825-1900)**

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Who was William Henry Green?

"Presbyterian theologian. Educated at Lafayette College (A.B., 1840) and Princeton Theological Seminary (1846), Green joined the faculty in 1851, beginning a career of teaching in Old Testament and Semitic studies. He wrote extensively and almost exclusively in his field of specialization and until his death was chairman of the Old Testament section of the committee that produced the American Revised Version (1901) of the Bible. In 1868 he was elected president of Princeton University but declined to accept. In 1891 he served as the moderator of the General Assembly of the

Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

"Like his other 'Old' Princeton colleagues, he was firmly committed to the divine inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. He was resolute in his opposition to the mounting influence of biblical criticism in America. Among his contemporaries he took the lead in refuting the documentary hypothesis of the origin of the Pentateuch. These emphases were reflected in his two-volume *General Introduction to the Old Testament* (1898) and *The Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (1895)."

-- R. B. Gaffin, "William Henry Green," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (InterVarsity, 1990).

#### A summary and recommendation of Green's article

"The general fact that the genealogies of Scripture were not constructed for a chronological purpose and lend themselves ill to employment as a basis for chronological calculations has been repeatedly shown very fully; but perhaps by no one more thoroughly than by Dr. William Henry Green in an illuminating article published in the *Bibliotheca Sacra* for April, 1890. These genealogies must be esteemed trustworthy for the purposes for which they are recorded; but they cannot safely be pressed into use for other purposes for which they were not intended, and for which they are not adapted. In particular, it is clear that the genealogical purposes for which the genealogies were given, did not require a complete record of all the generations through which the descent of the persons to whom they are assigned runs; but only an adequate indication of the particular line through which the descent in question comes. Accordingly it is found on examination that the genealogies of Scripture are freely compressed for all sorts of purposes; and that it can seldom be confidently affirmed that they contain a complete record of the whole series of generations, while it is often obvious that a very large number are omitted. There is no reason inherent in the nature of the Scriptural genealogies why a genealogy of ten recorded links, as each of those in Genesis v. and xi. is, may not represent an actual descent of a hundred or a thousand or ten thousand links. The point established by the table is not that these are all the links which intervened between the beginning and the closing names, but that this is the line of descent through which one traces back to or down to the other ....

"In a word, the Scriptural data leave us wholly without guidance in estimating the time which elapsed between the creation of the world and the deluge and between the deluge and the call of Abraham. So far as the Scripture assertions are concerned, we may suppose any length of time to have intervened between these events which may otherwise appear reasonable. The question of the antiquity of man is accordingly a purely scientific one, in which the theologian as such has no concern."

-- B. B. Warfield, "On the Antiquity and Unity of the Human Race," reprinted in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (P & R, 1968), pp. 238-261.

#### Other conservative theologians who accepted Green's conclusions

- Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol II, pp. 40-41.
- James Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, Pt II, ch IV.

- R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 147-52.
- Francis Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*

### The unabridged text of Green's "Primeval Chronology"

The question of the possible reconciliation of the results of scientific inquiry respecting the antiquity of man and the age of the world with the Scripture chronology has been long and earnestly debated. On the one hand, scientists, deeming them irreconcilable, have been led to distrust the divine authority of the Scriptures; and, on the other hand, believers in the divine word have been led to look upon the investigations of science with an unfriendly eye, as though they were antagonistic to religious faith. In 1863, I had occasion to examine the method and structure of the biblical genealogies, and incidentally ventured to remark that herein lay the solution of the whole matter. I said: "There is an element of uncertainty in a computation of time which rests upon genealogies, as the sacred chronology so largely does. Who is to certify us that the antediluvian and ante-Abrahamic genealogies have not been condensed in the same manner as the post-Abrahamic? ... Our current chronology is based upon the *prima facie* impression of these genealogies .... But if these recently discovered indications of the antiquity of man, over which scientific circles are now so excited, shall, when carefully inspected and thoroughly weighed, demonstrate all that any have imagined they might demonstrate, what then? They will simply show that the popular chronology is based upon a wrong interpretation, and that a select and partial register of ante-Abrahamic names has been mistaken for a complete one."

I here repeat, the discussion of the biblical genealogies above referred to, and add some further considerations which seem to me to justify the belief that the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 were not intended to be used, and cannot properly be used, for the construction of a chronology.

It can scarcely be necessary to adduce proof to one who has even a superficial acquaintance with the genealogies of the Bible, that they are frequently abbreviated by the omission of unimportant names. In fact, abridgment is the general rule, induced by the indisposition of the sacred writers to encumber their pages with more names than were necessary for their immediate purpose. This is so constantly the case, and the reason for it so obvious, that the occurrence of it need create no surprise anywhere, and we are at liberty to suppose it whenever anything in the circumstances of the case favors that belief.

The omissions in the genealogy of our Lord as given in Matthew 1 are familiar to all. Thus in verse 8 three names are dropped between Joram and Ozias (Uzziah), viz., Ahaziah (2 Kings 8:25), Joash (2 Kings 12:1), and Amaziah (2 Kings 14:1); and in verse 11 Johoiakim is omitted after Josiah (2 Kings 23:34; 1 Chron. 3:16); and in verse 1 the entire genealogy is summed up in two steps, "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

Other instances abound elsewhere; we mention only a few of the most striking. In 1 Chronicles 26:24 we read in a list of appointments made by King David (see 1 Chron. 24:3; 25:1; 26:26), that Shebuel [1], the son of Gershom, the son of Moses, was ruler of the treasures; and again in 1 Chronicles

23:15, 16, we find it written, "The sons of Moses were Gershom and Eliezer. Of the sons of Gershom Shebuel was the chief." Now it is absurd to suppose that the author of Chronicles was so grossly ignorant as to suppose that the grandson of Moses could be living in the reign of David, and appointed by him to a responsible office. Again, in the same connection (1 Chron. 26:31), we read that "among the Hebronites was Jerijah the chief;" and this Jerijah, or Jeriah (for the names are identical), was, according to 23:19, the first of the sons of Hebron, and Hebron was (v. 12) the son of Kohath, the son of Levi (v. 6). So that if no contraction in the genealogical lists is allowed, we have the great-grandson of Levi holding a prominent office in the reign of David.

The genealogy of Ezra is recorded in the book which bears his name; but we learn from another passage, in which the same line of descent is given, that it has been abridged by the omission of six consecutive names. This will appear from the following comparison, viz.:

1 Chronicles 6:3-14	Ezra 7:1-5
1. Aaron	Aaron
2. Eleazar	Eleazar
3. Phineas	Phineas
4. Abishua	Abishua
5. Bukki	Bukki
6. Uzzi	Uzzi
7. Zerahiah	Zerahiah
8. Meraioth	Meraioth
9. Amariah	
10. Ahitub	
11. Zadok	
12. Ahimaaz	
13. Azariah	
14. Johanan	
15. Azariah	Azariah
16. Amariah	Amariah
17. Ahitub	Ahitub
18. Zadok	Zadok
19. Shallum	Shallum
20. Hilkiah	Hilkiah
21. Azariah	Azariah

22. Seraiah	Seraiah
Ezra	

Still further, Ezra relates (8:1, 2):

"These are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king. Of the sons of Phinehas, Gerhsom. Of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel. Of the sons of David, Hattush."

Here, if no abridgment of the genealogy is allowed, we should have a great-grandson and a grandson of Aaron, and a son of David coming up with Ezra from Babylon after the captivity.

This disposition to abbreviate genealogies by the omission of whatever is unessential to the immediate purpose of the writer is shown by still more remarkable reductions than those which we have been considering. Persons of different degrees of relationship are sometimes thrown together under a common title descriptive of the majority, and all words of explanation, even those which seem essential to the sense, are rigorously excluded, the supplying of these chasms being left to the independent knowledge of the reader. Hence several passages in the genealogies of Chronicles have now become hopelessly obscure. They may have been intelligible enough to contemporaries: but for those who have no extraneous sources of information, the key to their explanation is wanting. In other cases we are able to understand them, because the information necessary to make them intelligible is supplied from parallel passages of Scripture. Thus the opening verses of Chronicles contain the following bald list of names without a word of explanation, viz.: Adam, Seth, Enosh; Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared; Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech; Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

We are not told who these persons are, how they were related to each other, or whether they were related. The writer presumes that his readers have the book of Genesis in their hands, and that the simple mention of these names in their order will be sufficient to remind them that the first ten trace the line of descent from father to son from the first to the second great progenitor of mankind; and that the last three are brothers, although nothing is said to indicate that their relationship is different from the preceding.

Again the family of Eliphaz, the son of Esau, is spoken of in the following terms in 1 Chronicles 1:36: "The sons of Eliphaz: Teman and Omar, Zephi and Gatam, Kenaz and Timna, and Amalek."

Now, by turning to Genesis 36:11, 12, we shall see that the first five are sons of Eliphaz, and the sixth his concubine, who was the mother of the seventh. This is so plainly written in Genesis that the author of the Chronicles, were he the most inveterate blunderer, could not have mistaken it. But trusting to the knowledge of his readers to supply the omission, he leaves out the statement respecting Eliphaz's concubine, but at the same time connects her name and that of her son with the family to which they belong, and this though he was professedly giving a statement of the sons of Eliphaz.

So, likewise, in the pedigree of Samuel (or Shemuel, v. 33, the difference in orthography is due to our translators, and is not in the original), which is given in 1 Chronicles 6 in both an ascending and descending series. Thus in verses 22-24: "The sons of Kohath; Amminadab his son, Korah his son, Assir his son; Elkanah his son, and Ebiasaph his son, and Assir his son; Tahath his son ...."

The extent to which the framer of this list has studied comprehensiveness and conciseness will appear from the fact, which no one would suspect unless informed from other sources, that while the general law which prevails in it is that of descent from father to son, the third, fourth, and fifth names represent brothers. This is shown by a comparison of Exodus 6:24, and the parallel genealogy, 1 Chronicles 6:36, 37. So that the true line of descent is the following, viz.:

In verses 22-24 -	Kohath	In verses 37-38 -	Kohath
	Amminadab		Izhar
	Korah		Korah
Assir, Elkanah,	Ebiasaph		Ebiasaph
	Assir		Assir
	Tahath, etc.		Tahath, etc.

The circumstance that the son of Kohath is called in one list Amminadab, and in the other Izhar, is no real discrepancy and can create no embarrassment, since it is no unusual thing for the same person to have two names. Witness Abram and Abraham; Jacob and Israel; Joseph and Zaphenath-peneah (Gen. 41:45), Hoshea, Jehoshua (Num. 13:16) (or Joshua) and Jeshua (Neh. 8:17), Gideon and Jerubbaal (Judg. 6:32), Solomon and Jedidiah (2 Sam. 12:24, 25), Azariah and Uzziah (2 Kings 15:1, 13), Daniel and Belteshazzar, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah and Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego (Dan. 1:7); Saul and Paul, Thomas and Didymus, Cephas and Peter, and in profane history Cyaxares and Darius, Octavianus and Augustus, Napoleon and Bonaparte, Ferretti and Pius IX.

The genealogy of Moses and Aaron is thus stated in Exodus 6:

V.16. "And these are the names of the sons of Levi, according to their generations; Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari: and the years of the life of Levi were an hundred and thirty and seven years."

17. "The sons of Gershon ...."

18. "And the sons of Kohath; Amram, and Izhar, and Hebron, and Uzziel; and the years of the life of Kohath were an hundred and thirty and three years."

19. "And the sons of Merari ...."

20. "And Amram took him Jochebed his father's sister to wife; and she bare him Aaron and Moses: and the years of the life of Amram were an hundred and thirty and seven years."

21. "And the sons of Izhar ...."

## 22. "And the sons of Uzziel ...."

There is abundant proof that this genealogy has been condensed, as we have already seen that so many others have been, by the dropping of some of the less important names.

This is afforded, in the first place, by parallel genealogies of the same period; as that of Bezaleel (1 Chron. 2:18-20), which records seven generations from Jacob; and that of Joshua (1 Chron. 7:23-27), which records eleven. Now it is scarcely conceivable that there should be eleven links in the line of descent from Jacob to Joshua, and only four from Jacob to Moses.

A still more convincing proof is yielded by Numbers 3:19, 27, 28, from which it appears that the four sons of Kohath severally gave rise to the families of the Amramites, the Izharites, the Hebronites, and the Uzzielites; and that the number of the male members of these families of a month old and upward was 8600 one year after the Exodus. So that, if no abridgment has taken place in the genealogy, the grandfather of Moses had, in the lifetime of the latter, 8600 descendents of the male sex alone, 2,750 of them being between the ages of thirty and fifty (Num. 4:36).

Another proof equally convincing is to be found in the fact that Levi's son Kohath was born before the descent into Egypt (Gen. 46:11); and the abode of the children of Israel in Egypt continued 430 years (Exod. 12:40, 41). Now as Moses was eighty years old at the Exodus (Exod. 7:7) he must have been born more than 350 years after Kohath, who consequently could not have been his own grandfather.

This genealogy, whose abbreviated character is so clearly established, is of special importance for the immediate purpose of this paper, because it might appear, at first sight, as though such an assumption was precluded in the present instance, and as though the letter of Scripture shut us up to the inevitable conclusion that there were four links, and no more, from Jacob to Moses. The names which are found without deviation in all the genealogies are Jacob, Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses (Exod. 6:16-20); Num. 3:17-19; 26:57-59; 1 Chron. 6:1-3, 16-18; 23:6, 12, 13). Now unquestionably Levi was Jacob's own son. So likewise Kohath was the son of Levi (Gen. 46:11) and born before the descent into Egypt. Amram also was the immediate descendent of Kohath. It does not seem possible, as Kurtz proposed, to insert the missing links between them. For, in the first place, according to Numbers 26:59, "The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, whom her mother bare to Levi in Egypt," this Jochebed being (Exod. 6:20) Amram's aunt, or his father's sister. Now, it is true, that "a daughter of Levi" might have the general sense of a descendent of Levi, as the woman healed by our Lord (Luke 13:16) is called "a daughter of Abraham;" and her being born to Levi might simply mean that she sprang from him (comp. Gen. 46:25). But these expressions must here be taken in a strict sense, and Jochebed accordingly must have been Levi's own daughter and the sister of Kohath, who must in consequence have been Amram's own father. This appears from a second consideration, viz., that Amram was (Num. 3:27) the father of one of the subdivisions of the Kohathites, these subdivisions springing from Kohath's own children and comprising together 8600 male descendents. Moses' father surely could not have been the ancestor of one-fourth of this number in Moses' own days.

To avoid this difficulty Tiele and Keil assume that there were two Amrams, one the son of Kohath, another the father of Moses, who was a more remote descendent but bore the same name with his ancestor. This relieves the embarrassment created by the Amramites (Num. 3:27) but is still liable to that which arises from making Jochebed the mother of Moses. And further, the structure of the genealogy in Exodus 6 is such as to make this hypothesis unnatural and improbable. Verse 16 names the three sons of Levi, Gershom, Kohath, and Merari; verses 17-19, the sons of each in their order; verses 20-22, the children of Kohath's sons; verses 23, 24, contain descendents of the next generation, and verse 25 the generation next

following. Now, according to the view of Tiele and Keil, we must either suppose that the Amram, Izhar, and Uzziel of verse 18, or else that Amram, though belonging to a later generation than Izhar and Uzziel, is introduced before them, which the regular structure of the genealogy forbids; and besides, the sons of Izhar and the sons of Uzziel, who are here named, were the contemporaries of Moses and Aaron the sons of Amram (Num. 16:1; Lev. 10:4).

This subject may be relieved from all perplexity, however, by observing that Amram and Jochebed were not the immediate parents, but the ancestors of Aaron and Moses. How many generations may have intervened, we cannot tell. It is indeed said (Exod. 6:20; Num. 26:59), that Jochebed bare them to Amram. But in the language of the genealogies this simply means that they were descended from her and from Amram. Thus, in Genesis 46:18, after recording the sons of Zilpah, her grandsons, and her great-grandsons, the writer adds, "These are the sons of Zilpah . . . and these she bare unto Jacob, even sixteen souls." The same thing recurs in the case of Bilhah (v. 25): "She bare these souls unto Jacob; all the souls were seven," (comp. also vv. 15, 22). No one can pretend here that the author of this register did not use the terms understandingly of descendants beyond the first generation. In like manner, according to Matthew 1:11, Josias begat his grandson Jechonias, and verse 8, Joram begat his great-great-grandson Ozias. And in Genesis 10:15-18 Canaan, the grandson of Noah, is said to have begotten several whole nations, the Jebusite, the Amorite, the Girgasite, the Hivite, etc. (Comp. also Gen. 25:23; Deut. 4:25; 2 Kings 20:18; Isa. 51:2.) Nothing can be plainer, therefore, than that, in the usage of the Bible, "to bear" and "to beget" are used in a wide sense to indicate descent, without restriction to the immediate offspring. [2]

It is no serious objection to this view of the case that in Leviticus 10:4 Uzziel, Amram's brother, is called "the uncle of Aaron." The Hebrew word here rendered "uncle," though often specifically applied to a definite degree of relationship, has, both from etymology and usage, a much wider sense. A great-great-grand-uncle is still an uncle, and would properly be described by the term here used.

It may also be observed that in the actual history of the birth of Moses his parents are not called Amram and Jochebed. It is simply said (Exod. 2:1), "and there went a man of the house of Levi, and took a wife a daughter of Levi."

After these preliminary observations, which were originally drawn up for another purpose, I come to the more immediate design of the present paper, by proceeding to inquire, whether the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 are necessarily to be considered as complete, and embracing all the links in the line of descent from Adam to Noah and from Shem to Abraham. And upon this I remark --

1. That the analogy of Scripture genealogies is decidedly against such a supposition. In numerous other instances there is incontrovertible evidence of more or less abridgment. This may even be the case where various circumstances combine to produce a different impression at the outset. Nevertheless, we have seen that this first impression may be dissipated by a more careful examination and a comparison of collateral data. The result of our investigations thus far is sufficient to show that it is precarious to assume that any biblical genealogy is designed to be strictly continuous, unless it can be subjected to some external tests which prove it to be so. And it is to be observed that the Scriptures furnish no collateral information whatever respecting the period covered by the genealogies now in question. The creation, the Flood, the call of Abraham, are great facts, which stand out distinctly in primeval sacred history. A few incidents respecting our first parents and their sons Cain and Abel are recorded. Then there is an almost total blank until the Flood, with nothing whatever to fill the gap, and nothing to suggest the length of time intervening but what is found in the genealogy stretching between these two points. And the case is substantially the same from the Flood to Abraham. So far as the biblical records go, we are left not only without adequate data, but without any data whatever, which can be brought into comparison with these genealogies for the sake of testing their continuity and completeness.

If, therefore, any really trustworthy data can be gathered from any source whatever, from any realm of scientific or antiquarian research, which can be brought into comparison with these genealogies for the sake of determining the question, whether they have noted every link in the chain of descent, or whether, as in other manifest instances, links have been omitted, such data should be welcomed and the comparison fearlessly made. Science would simply perform the office, in this instance, which information gathered from other parts of Scripture is unhesitatingly allowed to do in regard to those genealogies previously examined.

And it may be worth noting here that a single particular in which a comparison may be instituted between the primeval history of man and Genesis 5, suggests special caution before affirming the absolute completeness of the latter. The letter of the genealogical record (5:3) if we were dependent on it alone, might naturally lead us to infer that Seth was Adam's first child. But we know from Chapter 4 that he had already had two sons, Cain and Abel, and from 4:17 that he must have had a daughter, and from 4:14 that he had probably had several sons and daughters, whose families had swollen to a considerable number before Adam's one hundred and thirtieth year, in which Seth was born. Yet of all this the genealogy gives us no inkling.

2. Is there not, however, a peculiarity in the construction of these genealogies which forbids our applying to them an inference drawn from others not so constructed? The fact that each member of the series is said to have begotten the one next succeeding, is, in the light of the wide use of this term which we have discovered in other cases, no evidence of itself that links have not been omitted. But do not the chronological statements introduced into these genealogies oblige us to regard them as necessarily continuous? Why should the author be so particular to state, in every case, with unflinching regularity, the age of each patriarch at the birth of his son, unless it was his design thus to construct a chronology of this entire period, and to afford his readers the necessary elements for a computation of the interval from the creation to the deluge and from the deluge to Abraham? And if this was his design, he must, of course, have aimed to make his list complete. The omission of even a single name would create an error.

But are we really justified in supposing that the author of these genealogies entertained such a purpose? It is a noticeable fact that he never puts them to such a use himself. He nowhere sums these numbers, nor suggests their summation. No chronological statement is deduced from these genealogies, either by him or by any inspired writer. There is no computation anywhere in Scripture of the time that elapsed from the creation or from the deluge, as there is from the descent into Egypt to the Exodus (Exod. 12:40), or from the Exodus to the building of the temple (1 Kings 6:1). And if the numbers in these genealogies are for the sake of constructing a chronology, why are numbers introduced which have no possible relation to such a purpose? Why are we told how long each patriarch lived after the birth of his son, and what was the entire length of his life? These numbers are given with the same regularity as the age of each at the birth of his son; and they are of no use in making up a chronology of the period. They merely afford us a conspectus of individual lives. And for this reason doubtless they are recorded. They exhibit in these selected examples the original term of human life. They show what it was in the ages before the Flood. They show how it was afterwards gradually narrowed down. But in order to do this it was not necessary that every individual should be named in the line from Adam to Noah and from Noah to Abraham, nor anything approaching it. A series of specimen lives, with the appropriate numbers attached, this is all that has been furnished us. And if this be the case, the notion of basing a chronological computation upon these genealogies is a fundamental mistake. It is putting them to a purpose that they were not designed to subserve, and to which from the method of their construction they are not adapted. When it is said, for example, that "Enosh lived ninety years and begat Kenan," the well-established usage of the word "begat" makes this statement equally true and equally accordant with analogy, whether Kenan was an immediate or a remote descendent of Enosh; whether Kenan was himself born when Enosh was ninety years of age or one was born from whom Kenan sprang. These genealogies may yield us the minimum length of time that it is possible to accept for the period that they cover; but they can make no account of the duration represented by the names that have been dropped from the register, as needless for the author's particular purpose.

3. The abode of the children of Israel in Egypt affords for our present purpose the best Scripture parallel to the periods now under consideration. The

greater part of this term of 430 years is left blank in the sacred history. A few incidents are mentioned at the beginning connected with the descent of Jacob and his family into Egypt and their settlement there. And at its close mention is made of some incidents in the life of Moses and the events leading to the Exodus. But with these exceptions no account is given of this long period. The interval is only abridged by a genealogy extending from Levi to Moses and Aaron and their contemporaries among their immediate relatives (Exod. 6:16-26). This genealogy records the length of each man's life in the principal line of descent, viz., Levi (v. 16), Kohath (v. 18), Amram (v. 20). The correspondence in the points just indicated with the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11, and the periods which they cover, is certainly remarkable. And as they proceeded from the same pen, we may fairly infer from the similarity of construction a similarity of design. Now it has been shown already that the genealogy from Levi to Moses cannot have recorded all the links in that line of descent, and that it could not, therefore, have been intended to be used as a basis of chronological computation. This is rendered absolutely certain by the explicit statement in Exodus 12:40. It further appears from the fact that the numbers given in this genealogy exhibit the longevity of the patriarchs named, but cannot be so concatenated as to sum up the entire period; thus suggesting the inference that the numbers in the other genealogies, with which we are now concerned, were given with a like design, and not with the view of enabling the reader to construct the chronology.

4. As is well known, the texts of the Septuagint and of the Samaritan Pentateuch vary systematically from the Hebrew in both the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11. According to the chronologies based on these texts respectively, the interval between the Flood and the birth of Abraham was 292 (Hebrew), 942 (Samaritan), or 1172 years (Septuagint). Some have been disposed in this state of the case to adopt the chronology drawn from the Septuagint, as affording here the needed relief. But the superior accuracy of the Hebrew text in this instance, as well as generally elsewhere, can be incontrovertibly established. This resource, then, is a broken reed.

Thus in the Hebrew text of Genesis 5, the ages of different patriarchs at the birth of the son named are quite irregular, and vary from sixty-five to one hundred and eighty-seven. But the versions seek to bring them into closer conformity, and to introduce something like a regular gradation. The Septuagint proceeds on the assumption that the patriarchs of such enormity longevity should be nearly two centuries old at the birth of their son. Accordingly, when, in the Hebrew, they fall much below this standard, one hundred years are added to the number preceding the birth of the son and the same amount deducted from the number following his birth; the total length of each life is thus preserved without change, the proportion of its different parts alone being altered. The Samaritan, on the other hand, assumes a gradual diminution in the ages of successive patriarchs prior to the birth of their son, none rising to a century after the first two. When, therefore, the number in the Hebrew text exceeds one hundred, one hundred is deducted and the same amount added to the years after the son was born. In the case of Lamech the reduction is greater still, in order to effect the necessary diminution. Accordingly the years assigned to the several antediluvian patriarchs before the birth of their son in these several texts is as follows: --

	Hebrew	Septuagint	Samaritan
Adam	130	230	130
Seth	105	205	105
Enosh	90	190	90
Kenan	70	170	70
Mahalalel	65	165	65
Jared	162	162	62
Enoch	65	165	65
Methuselah	187	167 or 187 [3]	67
Lamech	182	188	53
Noah	600	600	600

A simple glance at these numbers is sufficient to show that the Hebrew is the original, from which the others diverge on the one side or the other, according to the principle which they have severally adopted. It likewise creates a strong presumption that the object contemplated in these changes was to make the lives more symmetrical, rather than to effect an alteration in the chronology.

5. The structure of the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 also favors the belief that they do not register all the names in these respective lines of descent. Their regularity seems to indicate intentional arrangement. Each genealogy includes ten names, Noah being the tenth from Adam, and Terah the tenth from Noah. And each ends with a father having three sons, as is likewise the case with the Cainite genealogy (4:17-22). The Sethite genealogy (chap. 5) culminates in its seventh member, Enoch, who "walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." The Cainite genealogy also culminates in its seventh member, Lamech, with his polygamy, bloody revenge, and boastful arrogance. The genealogy descending from Shem divides evenly at its fifth member, Peleg; and "in his days was the earth divided." Now this adjustment of the genealogy in Matthew 1 into three periods of fourteen generations each is brought about by dropping the requisite number of names, it seems in the highest degree probable that the symmetry of these primitive genealogies is artificial rather than natural. It is much more likely that this definite number of names fitting into a regular scheme has been selected as sufficiently representing the periods to which they belong, than that all these striking numerical coincidences should have happened to occur in these successive instances.

It may further be added that if the genealogy in Chapter 11 is complete, Peleg, who marks the entrance of a new period, died while all his ancestors from Noah onward were still living. Indeed Shem, Arphaxad, Selah, and Eber must all have outlived not only Peleg, but all the generations following as far as and including Terah. The whole impression of the narrative in Abraham's days is that the Flood was an even long since past, and that the actors in it had passed away ages before. And yet if a chronology is to be constructed out of this genealogy, Noah was for fifty-eight years the contemporary of Abraham, and Shem actually survived him thirty-five years, provided 11:26 is to be taken in its natural sense, that Abraham was born in Terah's seventieth year. This conclusion is well-nigh incredible. The calculation which leads to such a result, must proceed upon a wrong assumption.

On these various grounds we conclude that the Scriptures furnish no data for a chronological computation prior to the life of Abraham; and that the Mosaic records do not fix and were not intended to fix the precise date either of the Flood or of the creation of the world.

### Endnotes

[1] He is called in 1 Chron. 24:20 a son of Amram, the ancestor of Moses; for Shubael and Shebuel are in all probability mere orthographic variations of the same name.

[2] In Ruth 4:17 Ruth's child is called "a son born to Naomi," who was Ruth's mother-in-law and not even an ancestor of the child in the strict sense. Zerubbabel is called familiarly the son of Shealtiel (Ezra 3:2; Hag. 1:1), and is so stated to be in the genealogies of both Matt. 1:12 and Luke 3:27, though in reality he was his nephew (2 Chron. 3:17-19). That descent as reckoned in genealogies is not always that of actual parentage appears from the comparisons of the ancestry of our Lord as given by Matthew and by Luke.

[3] The number varies in different manuscripts.

Chronology: a proposed harmony between genesis and the sumerian king list. The Chronology of Genesis 5 | A New Chronology of the Bible | The Sumerian King List Prologue Back to Erech I | Kish | The Possibilities for Pre-adamism. I. the chronology of genesis 5.Â

Nonetheless, Ussher's chronology is still printed in the marginal notes of several Bible versions, and more than one unsuspecting Christian has been tempted to regard the margin as possessing equal inspiration with the main text. The primeval history, the name given by biblical scholars to the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis, is a story of the first years of the world's existence. It tells how God creates the world and all its beings and places the first man and woman (Adam and Eve) in his Garden of Eden, how the first couple are expelled from God's presence, of the first murder which follows, and God's decision to destroy the world and save only the righteous Noah and his sons; a new humanity then descends from