

# APPENDIX

This appendix includes two articles that were published elsewhere; they both concern Genesis 5 and there is a very slight overlap of material even though the second was designed to follow the first.

## Ante-diluvian Genealogies

If the genealogy of Genesis 5 is counted literally and consecutively in a modern way, the pre-history is short and recent (including Noah), and this flies in the face of any number of scientific disciplines. If the human ages are **notional** and the genealogy is **partly non-consecutive**, then the length of the pre-history is undetermined.

The Old Testament scholar, K. A. Kitchen, offers a standard discussion of the genealogy of Genesis 5 in relation to the king lists and reign lengths of Mesopotamian monarchs. In Sumerian and Akkadian king lists, prior to the flood there were eight or ten kings stretching back until kingship was “lowered from the heavens”. In the Sumerian King List (SKL), for example, the total number of years for the reigns of the eight kings is 241,000 years, whereas the total number of years for the reigns of the kings after the flood is 24,510, and 2310 years for a sequence of 23 and then 12 kings.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the Sumerian King List documents a long pre-history before the Flood in terms of a seven, eight or ten series of kings and their reigns (depending on the tablet), the genealogy of Genesis 5 works with ten generations and fewer years.<sup>2</sup> Both counts break at the Flood; each has large numbers and the years decline dramatically after the Flood. Their common “8/10” framework<sup>3</sup> allows the suggestion that we have here a **notional use of numbers** in Genesis 5 to structure an unknown and long period of time.

A second point to make here is that the genealogy in Genesis 5 is not necessarily fully consecutive—the father-son relationship may in some instances be a grandfather-grandson relationship, or there may be a multiple of intervening generations. The opening entries of the genealogy are,

And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth: And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years: and he begat sons and daughters: And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died. And Seth lived an hundred and five years, and begat Enosh: And Seth lived after he begat Enosh eight hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters. And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years: and he died. And Enos lived ninety years, and begat Cainan: And Enosh lived after he begat Cainan eight hundred and fifteen years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years: and he died. Gen 5:3-9 (KJV revised)

---

<sup>1</sup> ANET, 265; K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 439f.

<sup>2</sup> This comparison is true in a general way if both Genesis and the Sumerian King List are using a decimal system; however, the King List is actually using a modified sexagesimal system. J. H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 127-131, shows how the two decimal and sexagesimal systems align very closely in their totals after conversion, if the original compiler of the Sumerian King List was using the Genesis 5 genealogy and misunderstood its digits as a modified sexagesimal number. In this way, Walton makes a case for the Genesis genealogy being the older text. This is not to say that the Genesis genealogy is based on or derived from the SKL; it is a genealogy and not a king list; see G. F. Hasel, “The Meaning of the Chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11” *Origins* 7/2 (1980): 53-70, for a young earth creationist critique of the view that Genesis 5 is to be compared to the SKL. [Online.]

<sup>3</sup> The use of “ten generations” as a motif to exhaust a period of time is seen in the Law, “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord **forever**” (Deut 23:3, KJV).

We would normally read this today as a consecutive sequence without any gaps. However, the early story of Genesis 4 documents the birth of Cain and Abel before Seth. The genealogy of Genesis 5 gives no hint of a Cain or an Abel or any other sons and daughters before Seth, but a reader should take this information and use it to condition his or her understanding of the genealogy of Genesis 5.

Seth is a first generation son of Adam because we are told Adam ‘knew’ his wife (Gen 4:25), but Enosh may not be a first generation son of Seth as he only ‘names’ him – it could be a grand-child of his in a later generation (Gen 4:26); likewise Cainan may be a grandson, or a great-grandson, or an even a more distant ‘son’ of Enosh (because there is no ‘knowing’ or ‘naming’ and Enosh may have died); the genealogy may have gaps. The birth of Cainan to Enosh may be the birth of a *forbear* of Cainan, the individual in whose line Cainan was born. It would have to be a forbear of Cainan to make sense of the detail that the person was born when Enosh was a certain age. This point is important as it should prevent a reader from treating the genealogy of Genesis 5 as a simple consecutive sequence of father-son relationships—there could be a great deal of time after Enosh and before Cainan.<sup>4</sup>

The real indication that the genealogy of Genesis 5 should be read partly in a non-consecutive way is the absence of the added information of “calling the name of the son”: this detail is recorded for Seth in Gen 5:3, Enosh in Gen 4:26, and for Noah in Gen 5:29 but not for the other “sons”; the number of generations in the middle of the genealogy is therefore unknown.

Why would the genealogy be partly a genealogy of forbears? The clue lies in the generation that involves Enoch and it has to do with **prophecy**. The genealogy records that Enoch ‘walked’ with God after he begat Methuselah for 300 years. This information might indicate that Methuselah was the direct son of Enoch, but the detail of ‘walking with God’ suggests that there has been a renewal of a covenant and a prophecy of a son. The same connection of ‘walking’, the birth of a son, and the mention of an age, is found in the episode of Abram and Sara and the prophecy of the birth of Isaac. At the age of 99, God invited Abraham to walk before him and promised that he would be a father (Gen 17:1f). A covenant was made and Isaac was promised (Gen 17:16f). This is what the genealogy of Genesis 5 is indicating in its brief remark about Enoch.

The Enoch record provides the key to the genealogy: each of these patriarchs is given a prophecy of a son. The prophecy to Adam regarding Seth told Eve that God had appointed her another seed instead of Abel (Gen 4:25). The prophecy to Lamech concerning Noah included the detail about comfort (Gen 5:29). The example of Enoch ‘walking’ suggests that the age of the progenitor and the birth of the ‘son’ in the genealogy is tied to a renewal of covenant.<sup>5</sup>

We have said that the genealogy is partly non-consecutive; this is because in the cases of Adam-Seth, Seth-Enos and Lamech-Noah there is a calling of the son’s name. The other generations lack this detail and therefore the prophecy of the son is that of a more distant descendant.

This interpretation makes sense in the light of the nomination of only ten generations; there are ten names that structure the family history of Noah. The colophon in Gen 6:9, “These are the records of the generations of Noah” (NASB), makes the genealogy part of Noah’s ancestry.<sup>6</sup> The ten-fold stylised

---

<sup>4</sup> In addition, we should observe that there were many sons and daughters born to each of the names before the descendent who is named; this is shown by the example of Adam and Eve with Seth and implied by the great age at which the “son” (forbear) is born.

<sup>5</sup> Dating is important to contracts and business throughout the ages. When does a contract begin? For how long will it operate? When will it end? A reference point is needed. We work with a Julian calendar, but in the ante-diluvian era, contracts would take their reference point from a king, a governor, or a patriarch. The age of the progenitor for the birth of the ‘son’ allows correlation of dates in drawing up contracts between two related families – the descendants of the progenitor and the descendants of the ‘son’.

<sup>6</sup> On this see, R. K. Harrison, “From Adam to Noah: A Reconsideration of the Antediluvian Patriarchs’ Ages” *JETS* 37/2 (1994): 161-168 (162); P. J. Wiseman, *New Discoveries in Babylonia about Genesis* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1946), chap. 5.

arrangement is mirrored in the genealogy of Cain: although it is a 6 generation framework, both end with an individual who has three sons, and both have similarly-named ancestors. Such a selection from history (i.e. the reality of these individuals) supports the interpretation of the ages in the genealogy as notional.

The other difficulty that modern readers have with the genealogy is the longevity of the individuals; the oldest man lived for 969 years and this is dismissed as an unbelievable ‘fantastic’ number. Again, a modern reader is assuming that the ages given are literal, but the modern’s case against the ages being real consists simply of the estimates of death given by archaeological anthropologists of the dead that they uncover in any grave sites in the Near East from any point in the past. Furthermore, there is no basis in paleo-biology for supposing that human life spans were much different 10,000 years ago. If we thus assume that men and women lived to what we regard as normal ages (and then some<sup>7</sup>), we should ask: *why* are very long ages given here in Genesis 5 and in the Mesopotamian king lists?

One kind of response would be to reject the ages given as ‘real’ and regard the numbers as false; we could then reject the historicity of the genealogy as a whole and use this conclusion to cast doubt on the historical value of the primeval history. This kind of reaction would be simplistic, and we should instead ask: if those who composed the genealogy knew very well how long humans typically lived (whatever we say that was; life-spans could have been longer back then), *why* would they employ very long ages in the first place? A preliminary point would be that we are assuming the long ages given were ubiquitous among humans, but **the only data we have relates to ten individuals.**

Some conservative commentators do see literal ages in the genealogy and they observe that one long age is not associated with a birth or a death, and that is the fact that Enoch “walked” with God for 300 years; this needs further explanation.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the reduction of human ages after the Flood to between 100-200 years and then to around seventy plus years was gradual over a few generations. Thus, it is suggested that God intervened after the Flood so that human beings had shorter life-spans; the precedent for this is Gen 6:3, “And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also *is* flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years” (KJV). These commentators affirm that the speed of ageing was accelerated.

This approach is problematic for critical scholars of the Bible because it involves the idea of divine intervention. This is a ‘problem’ that occurs in several other places in the Old Testament where the miraculous is recorded or implied. In response, conservative scholars have tried different approaches: for example, it has been said that the Hebrew digits are not decimal (base-10) but base-2 or some other base; or, the numbers are aligned with an old cosmological scheme related to the planets; and, even, the years are not solar years but some other (perhaps lunar) “year”. These suggestions, and others, show that scholars do not dismiss the genealogy as poor history; there is a good case (noted above<sup>9</sup>) to be made for it being older than Mesopotamian king lists in composition. Rather, they seek to explain the *use of large numbers* in the genealogy by scribes perfectly familiar with the relatively short human life span. Of these approaches, the best harmonizing suggestion is that the numbers are notional<sup>10</sup> and serve the purpose of structuring an unknown long period of time; but that nevertheless the human life span was in fact longer than it is currently. How does this work?

The ages that are given mostly cluster above the 900 mark—just short of a thousand years. Lamech’s life is cut short just before the Flood and Enoch is a special case, but otherwise the 900 +/- pattern is carefully chosen, because the choice of a “thousand years” as a limiting period isn’t arbitrary. In the “Prayer of

---

<sup>7</sup> This is an important qualification: the age data from later Genesis would suggest that a couple of hundred years or more was the norm for the Genesis 5 individuals.

<sup>8</sup> Our proposal is that all the progenitors walked with God, but because Enoch’s life was cut short (‘he was not’), the detail emerges in the genealogy.

<sup>9</sup> Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context*, 127-131.

<sup>10</sup> The genealogy uses two verbs: the days ‘were’ so many years and an individual ‘lived’ for so many years. This choice means that the names are not the names of ages, such as the ‘Adamic Age’ or the ‘Age of Lamech’, following the convention of monarchies (e.g. Tudor, Hanover or Windsor). A lived long age is the meaning.

Moses”, it is said that, “...in your eyes a thousand years are like yesterday that quickly passes, or like one of the divisions of the night time” (Ps 90:4). The comment is, no doubt, a metaphor for the passage of time and how God marks the ages. The New Testament writer Peter makes a comment on this verse when he says, “Now, dear friends, do not let this one thing escape your notice—that a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years are like a single day.” (2 Pet 3:8).

This language is relevant to Genesis 5 because in Genesis 2 God had declared that were Adam to sin, he would die in **the day** that he sinned (Gen 2:17). If the poetic understanding of time expressed in the Prayer of Moses is at work in Genesis 5, the limitation of the antediluvian ages to just under a thousand years is one way in which the compiler of these traditions (traditionally Moses<sup>11</sup>) shows the fulfilment of God’s edict of death: the refrain of the genealogy is after all “and he died” (8x). If a thousand years are as a day in God’s eyes, all these men did die in the kind of “day” that God had decreed for Adam’s dying.

The understanding implicit in the Prayer of Moses is relevant to our reading of Genesis 5. The prayer starts off (vv. 1-5) as a meditation on the early chapters of Genesis with its references to “all generations”, “giving birth to the earth”, “children of Adam”, “destruction” and a “flood”. If a long and unknown period of time was going to be structured with ten generations, ages just under a thousand years would be chosen to conform to God’s attitude to the passage of time and the edict that Adam was to die in the “day” that he sinned. The opening verses of Moses’ prayer reconcile the apparent contradiction between Genesis 2 and 5 in its meditation.

The Old Testament account of creation is often ridiculed because the genealogy of Genesis 5 is conventionally totalled up to give an age for the earth of around 6000 years. The historical reliability of the whole of the Old Testament is then thrown into doubt. This is a poor stance to adopt. The genealogy is “of its times” in using large numbers to structure unknown history; if we reject the literality of the numbers, this does not mean the individuals are not historical individuals. Further, it does not mean that the individuals had our lifespan; the later records in Genesis indicate lifespans of 200 years or more. However, once we observe that there is no name-calling from Cainan onwards until Noah, we have a basis for treating the genealogy as having substantial gaps and the pre-history of Genesis becomes an indeterminate period;<sup>12</sup> the genealogy itself does not engage in totalling up.

Two pieces of information outside the genealogy, but still within the primeval history, bear on the question of the long ages.

(1) The story of Adam and Eve, and then Cain and Abel, is a family story: these characters are of the same extended family. The genealogy of Genesis 5 should be seen against the command to the male and female to be fruitful and multiply in Gen 1:26 and the command to farm in Gen 1:28, commands which were intended for fulfilment *immediately*. This implies that Cain, Abel and Seth are just members of a burgeoning lineage from Adam and Eve and that the principle of selection for the genealogy is that of ‘appointed seeds’ (Gen 4:26). However, what is required for a burgeoning lineage from which Cain selects a wife is the passage of time and the having of children, and we can infer that this required a longer life-time for Adam and Eve than the norm today.

(2) Cain is banished from his immediate family but fears being slain by others. That there were others outside his immediate family implies migration and family groups now more remotely related to Adam and Eve and this implies a passage of time longer than the life-times known today. The story of Cain and Abel is not set a year or two after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, but much later. Even if the age of Adam at which Seth is born is notional, it is nevertheless indicative of how much time we should consider as having passed before Cain murders Abel – over a hundred years.

---

<sup>11</sup> W. C. Kaiser, *The Old Testament Documents: Are they Reliable and Relevant?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 57-58; Wiseman, *New Discoveries in Babylonia about Genesis*, chap. 8.

<sup>12</sup> The start of the age of civilization is usually dated to about 10,000 BCE, which is one way to estimate the time period of the genealogy.

This information, (1) and (2), shows that the principle of selection in the genealogy of Genesis 5 is that of the ‘appointed seeds’. The ‘seed’ here is the idea of the chosen line through which the promise belonging to the family will continue (i.e. the promise of Gen 3:15). The story of Cain and Abel shows that the line was not to be through Cain or Abel but Seth; hence, it is Adam’s age at the birth of Seth that is noted.

The question arises as to why the age of the progenitor is noted for the time of the birth of the ‘son’ and then his lifespan noted for the period after the birth. These are two characteristics that distinguish the genealogy from other biblical genealogies after Genesis 11, as well as the ANE king lists which we considered earlier. Our answer is that the recording of the age of the progenitor indexes the beginning of the line of descent. In the case of Adam this is the notional age of 130 years; this is the time from which the next promised (prophesied) seed is to be counted, i.e. the chosen branch of the family is dated to a year in the progenitor’s life.

## The Genealogy of Genesis 5

### Introduction

This article<sup>13</sup> is concerned with the genealogy of Genesis 5. The sceptic baulks at the high ages and the total number of years that s/he calculates for the creation of Adam and Eve. Both young earth and old earth creationists read the chapter in a non-consecutive way, unless the young earth creationist is a strict literalist. Our interest in the genealogy is in finding the reason why the age of the father is given for the birth of the ‘son’ along with that for his death; why are there **two ages** rather than one or even none?<sup>14</sup>

### Patterns in the Ages

We can infer that everyone after Adam and Eve lived for hundreds of years, even though the genealogy of Genesis 5 shows nothing more than the ages recorded for a few individuals. Although no ages are recorded in Cain’s genealogy, it too requires long lifespans, because Cain is credited with building a settlement; this detail implies sufficient undocumented population growth to support ‘building’ a settlement. Since this happens between Cain and Enoch, it implies a greater lifespan for Cain in order for there to have been several generations of children. Cain names the settlement<sup>15</sup> after his son Enoch, and rapid frontier population growth is implied with multiple lineages. (Outside the genealogy of Cain, rapid undocumented population growth is also implied by the fact of Cain’s wife.) The genealogy of Genesis 4 is not our topic in this paper, but it is worth noting that its incidental detail from the start implies that it is **not a consecutive record** of fathers and sons.

---

<sup>13</sup> It follows on from A. Perry, “Pre-Historic Genealogies” *CeJBI* (Oct, 2010): 29-35; it takes that article forward.

<sup>14</sup> The numbers given are different in the MT, LXX and the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP); we offer no comments on these differences except to say that the LXX and SP are early examples of the re-working of the system of numbers in the Hebrew. This is indicated by the three traditions agreeing on the numbers for Noah but generally not the rest, suggesting Noah’s numbers are a foundation for calculation.

<sup>15</sup> Translations opt for ‘city’ but the term covers the range of human settlements.

Scholars have long compared the high ages and the ten generational pattern of Genesis 5 to the Sumerian King List (SKL)<sup>16</sup> and used Babylonian sexagesimal mathematics to interpret the numbers.<sup>17</sup> The hypothesis has been that the ages are the results of an algebraic formula working to a sexagesimal base. The consequence of these comparisons is that the high ages at death come down, but to exactly where is a matter of supposition about the underlying formula. Scholars have their eye on natural lifespans today in setting a formula as well as later patriarchal ages (c. 70 or 200) which is why they offer different formulae.

If we assume today's natural lifespan for the genealogies of Genesis 4 and 5, we do not have the necessary framework for the population growth implied by the incidental detail in Genesis 4. A formula that yields a high age is required by the details in Genesis 4, which is overlooked by scholars puzzling over the mathematics of Genesis 5. We do not have the formulae and we might be tempted to dismiss the whole strategy, but we cannot assume that the numbers are a simple record of two ages because they do betray certain patterns. That the numbers are not random but chosen for a reason might be suspected by their mostly ending in '0' or '5'. The natural cycles in procreation would suggest a more random distribution of 'birth' ages if this was the intent of the genealogy.<sup>18</sup> Another indication that the 'birth' ages are chosen for a reason other than 'birth' is the age of Noah at the 'birth' of his sons; this is of a different order (500) to the other 'birth' ages in the genealogy.

Moreover, with the Flood happening when Noah was 600 (Gen 7:6), it is significant that the ages of Shem reverse this 500+100 pattern, with Shem being 100 when he begat Arphaxad and then living after that for another 500 years. After Shem, in the Genesis 11 genealogy, the ages plummet in two stages by a factor of 200 years each time. The first stage is associated with the Flood, with Arphaxad born two years after the Flood; the second stage happens with Peleg in whose days the earth was divided (Gen 10:25, Babel). The pattern here is that the decrease in age from 900 to 400 and then to 200 **marks major historical happenings**.

The genealogy of Genesis 5 is often read as a simple father-son genealogy, but the above patterns<sup>19</sup> show that the genealogy reflects **history** and is co-ordinated to something more than the year a father had a son or the lifespan of the patriarch.

### Forbears

We might say that where there is no detail in the record of the father giving his son a name, there might be intervening **forbears** between the father and the 'son'. A naming of the son is recorded for Seth in Gen 5:3 and for Noah in Gen 5:29 but not for the other 'sons' (Enosh is named outside the genealogy in Gen 4:26). There may therefore be a number of generations in the middle of the genealogy.

---

<sup>16</sup> ANET, 265; K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 439f. This is not to say that the Genesis genealogy is based on or derived from the SKL; it is after all a genealogy and not a king list; see G. F. Hasel, "The Meaning of the Chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11" *Origins* 7/2 (1980): 53-70, for a young earth creationist critique of the view that Genesis 5 is to be compared to the SKL. [Online.] And see T. C. Hartman, "Some Thoughts on the Sumerian King List and Genesis 5 and 11B" *JBL* 91 (1972): 25-32, for further critique. He concludes, "The possibility seems real, indeed, that the number of ten antediluvians is more closely tied to this West Semitic (Amorite) penchant for a ten-generation pattern than it is to inspiration arising from the Sumerian King List" (32). However, R. R. Wilson, "The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research" *JBL* 94/2 (1975): 169-189, provides further research that questions Hartman. The arguments between scholars here do not countermand our general point that a restricted generational pattern and high ages are evidenced in the broad ANE context.

<sup>17</sup> The principal advocate lately has been D. W. Young, "On the Application of Numbers from Babylonian Mathematics to Biblical Life Spans and Epochs" *ZAW* 100 (1988): 331-361; "The Influence of Babylonian Algebra on Longevity among the Antediluvians" *ZAW* 102 (1990), 321-335; "The Sexagesimal Basis for the Total Years of the Antediluvian and Postdiluvian Epochs" *ZAW* 116 (2004): 502-527.

<sup>18</sup> J. L. Hayward and D. E. Casebolt, "The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11: A Statistical Study" *Origins* 9/2 (1982): 75-81. "The concept of statistical nonrandomness which we are postulating states only that the numbers appear biased, suggesting that the Genesis genealogical age data fail to provide a defensible basis upon which to construct a precise-pre-Abrahamic chronology of the world." [Available Online]

<sup>19</sup> See the earlier article for other patterns.

The Genesis 5 genealogy is ‘the book/scroll of’ the generations of Adam (Gen 5:1). This reads the *Toledot* formula here forwards, which is the most natural reading. The phrase ‘the book of the generation of’ is quoted in Matt 1:1 in relation to Jesus’ genealogy (reading forward). Jesus’ genealogy is stylised according to a 14 generations pattern which complements the 10 generations pattern of Genesis 5. The point of comparison here is not that genealogical practice was the same for the recorder of Genesis 5 and Matthew (hundreds of years later), but that Matthew is **quoting** a feature of the Genesis 5 genealogy as a whole. In the light of this, it is significant that Matthew’s genealogy has forbear gaps (Matt 1:8).

If there are forbear gaps in the Genesis 5 genealogy, what would be the reason for recording the age of the father at the birth of the ‘son’? The genealogy of Genesis 5 records that Enoch ‘walked’ with God for 300 years after he begat Methuselah. The detail of ‘walking with God’ suggests that there has been a renewal of a covenant and a **prophecy of a son**. The same connection of ‘walking’, a prophecy, the birth of a son, and the mention of the age of the father, is found in the episode of Abram and Sara and the prophecy of the birth of Isaac. At the age of 99, God invited Abraham to walk before him and promised that he would be a father (Gen 17:1f). A covenant was made and a son was promised (Gen 17:16f). This is what the genealogy of Genesis 5 is indicating in its brief remark about Enoch ‘walking’, the mention of his age, and the birth of the ‘son’. We should note too for Noah, that he ‘walked’ with God but he begat three sons (Gen 6:9-10); this is the same close association of ideas as with Enoch.

The Enoch record provides the key to the genealogy: each of these patriarchs is given a prophecy of a son. That prophecies underlie the genealogical records is also shown in there being a prophecy to Adam regarding Seth which told Eve that God had appointed her another seed instead of Abel (Gen 4:25), and in there being a prophecy to Lamech concerning Noah which included a promise about comfort (Gen 5:29). In fact, it is also implied that there had been a prophecy about Abel, that he was the seed, because Eve talks of ‘another’ seed (and possibly even Cain, who Eve acknowledges as from the Lord – Gen 4:1). Finally, a prophecy is implied by the birth of Enosh because men began to call upon the name of the Lord at that point.

It is not just a speculation then to suppose that there might have been intervening forbears before the birth of some of the ‘sons’ that are recorded. Cain and Abel are not forbears to Seth, but they do intervene before him and are unrecorded in the genealogy. What then about the **two** ages noted in the records?

### **Two Ages**

The characteristic of the record that is really distinctive is not the high ages of the patriarchs at death but the fact that there are **two** ages. Take the inclusion of the age of the patriarch at the birth of the ‘son’. In the case of Levi and Kohath, in a Levitical genealogy, their duration of life is given, but not their age at the birth of a son (Exod 6:16-25). Except for Genesis 11, later genealogies like the one at the end of Ruth, don’t even give a duration of life, and so this Levitical genealogy is distinctive for also including the duration of life of the father.

The record of Noah might appear an exception to the ‘two ages’ pattern, there being only the ‘birth’ age (Gen 5:32), and as the last generation to be recorded, this might be set aside in our analysis as an exception. However, the death formulae of the genealogy are actually carried forward for Noah, but to Gen 9:28-29 – ‘lived after’ and ‘all the days of’ are picked up and re-used. On the other hand, instead of there being one ‘son’ recorded at the age of the patriarch, Noah has three sons listed at his age of 500 years.<sup>20</sup> This raises the question of when Shem, Ham and Japheth were each born (Gen 10:21). This implies that the ‘begat’ ages in the genealogy do not have to be about the year of birth. It could be the age at which the prophecy of the ‘son’ was given. The episode of Abram and Sara supports this reading. The ‘son’ may follow after a year, or a few years in the case of Shem, Ham or Japheth, or it may be longer if there were a number of forbears.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> There is no notice of many sons and daughters being born unto Noah.

<sup>21</sup> The Genesis 11 genealogy also ends with three sons and with the same formula, “And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran.” However, Abram was born 60 years after Terah was 70 (Gen 12:4; Acts 7:4). Each genealogy is not about adding the age of the father to the son and so on, because both end with three sons.

The age of Noah is of a different order to all the other ages at 'birth' in the genealogy. Such a difference strongly suggests that a prophecy about three sons marks this time, and that they are chosen because the Flood is shortly going to happen and that they are to re-populate the land. However, the three sons of Noah are not equally the chosen seed and this also breaks the pattern of the genealogy. In their case, the prophecy which selects the chosen line is subsequent to the Flood, when Shem is signalled out from his brothers (Gen 9:26). The line of descent is shown at this time.

We have enough textual evidence here to infer that the 'sons' of Genesis 5 are the appointed seeds and the subject of prophecy. The age of the father at the birth of the 'son' can signal the time of the prophecy rather than actual birth which may follow years later. **It is also a device that allows the genealogy to pass over forbears in making a record.**

The ante-diluvian patriarchs had many sons and daughters. Of these there is a chosen line periodically identified through prophecy. How then does the family record the fulfilment of the prophecy when it occurs? It can do so through the preservation of a genealogical record passed down orally through the generations and augmented from time to time. It wouldn't be necessary to record the age of the father if a prophecy was always fulfilled immediately through a first generation son and the son was named (though it could be a redundant detail). It would however be necessary to identify the chosen seed by reference to the age of the father if there had been forbears and he was not a first generation son; this would tie the fulfilment of the prophecy to the father and the right forbear at the same time as identifying the son. It would simultaneously exclude the other first generation sons of the father, and their lines of descent, while identifying the line of descent from the 'son' back through the generations to the father. The prophecy was about a father and a son, and specifying the 'son' and relating him to the father at a certain age therefore records how the prophecy was fulfilled.

The pattern of giving the age of the patriarch at the birth of the 'son' and the duration of life subsequently continues for Seth's genealogy in Genesis 11 and for Abram, Isaac and Jacob; and there are prophecies involved (Gen 25:26; 25:7; 35:28). The pattern stops with Jacob.

The Genesis 5/11 genealogies are unique. Cain's genealogy doesn't have the ages recorded. The notion of there being a 'son of prophecy' is established in Gen 3:15 and this explains why the age of the father at the birth of the 'son' is given in Genesis 5/11 – it is an ongoing expression of hope in that promise. Lamech's words are poignant and pertinent, "This *same* shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed." This tells us the point of the genealogy at the end of the genealogy (or in its middle if we include Genesis 11 and the birth prophecies and notices of Abraham Isaac and Jacob). The purpose of the genealogy is to identify who it was hoped would be the one to relieve the curse, i.e. the named 'son'.<sup>22</sup>

Someone might say that the purpose of the two ages in these genealogies is to allow the calculation of the date of creation, particularly the date of the making of Adam. Certainly, Jewish and Christian commentators since have used the ages in this way, ignoring the possibility of forbears in the process. Whether patriarchs up to the time of Jacob were ever concerned with the date of the making of Adam is another matter about which we might be doubtful.<sup>23</sup> There is practical value in recording the age of the father at the birth of the 'son' – **it secures the Edenic faith**; but what is the practical value in a calculation about the date of creation?

## The Age at Death

---

<sup>22</sup> The purpose of the genealogy is social and serves the purposes of recording the promise made to the *generations* of Adam.

<sup>23</sup> There is no totalling of the years at the end of the genealogy. We do have totalling of years in some other texts such as Gen 15:13; Exod 12:40; and 1 Kgs 6:1. Moreover, **anthropological studies** would suggest that such a use for the genealogy would be unlikely; see Wilson, "The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research", 178f.

Recording the age of a person when they died is not exceptional, and this data may carry no significance, whether for dating creation or anything more personal. On the other hand, if there is significance in recording how long a patriarch lived it is likely that it is in the reasoning behind the refrain ‘and he died’, which is noted for all the patriarchs in the genealogy including Noah (Gen 9:29), with Enoch the only exception. This refrain is unique to this genealogy.

The significance of ‘and he died’ is set by the narrative story up to this point and the leading information that the reader has is the pronouncement to Adam and Eve about their dying. Dying is important to the purpose of the genealogy as well as the birth of the ‘son’ of promise. They counter-balance each other. The genealogy of Genesis 11 does not have this refrain, and so we are being directed to think of Genesis 5 in connection with the reality of Adam’s punishment. The relevant intertextual link is ‘all the days of’, another refrain of the genealogy, which is quoted from Gen 3:14, 17 and particularly from the **curse on the ground**.<sup>24</sup>

The ages that are given mostly cluster above the 900 mark—just short of a thousand years. Lamech’s life is cut short just before the Flood and Enoch is a special case, but otherwise the 900 +/- pattern is carefully chosen, because the choice of a “thousand years” as a limiting period isn’t arbitrary. In the “Prayer of Moses”, it is said that, “...in your eyes a thousand years are like yesterday that quickly passes, or like one of the divisions of the night time” (Ps 90:4). The comment is, no doubt, a simile for the passage of time and how God marks the ages. The New Testament writer Peter makes a comment on this verse when he says, “Now, dear friends, do not let this one thing escape your notice—that a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years are like a single day.” (2 Pet 3:8).

This language is relevant to Genesis 5 because, in Genesis 2, God had declared that were Adam to sin, he would die in **the day** that he sinned (Gen 2:17). If the divine perception of time expressed in the Prayer of Moses is at work in Genesis 5, the limitation of the antediluvian ages to just under a thousand years is another way in which the Edenic faith is expressed. Alongside the record of the ‘son’ of promise, there is an inner-biblical exegesis going on of the curse on the ground. If a thousand years are as a day in God’s eyes, all these men did die in the kind of “day” that God had decreed for Adam’s dying. The ‘and he died’ of Noah (Gen 9:29) is the end of this pattern, which significantly coincides with the promise after the Flood that “I will not again **curse the ground** any more for man’s sake” (Gen 8:21).

Scholars do not dismiss the genealogy as lacking historical value. Rather, they seek to explain the *use* of large numbers in the genealogy. The best suggestion is that the numbers are **notional** and based on an underlying algebraic formula<sup>25</sup> which produces the high age as a product. This device serves the purpose of structuring an unknown long period of time while at the same time preserving the ancestry through which the Edenic faith was transmitted across the ‘missing’ generations of forbears. The history was constructed and recorded in a scroll. R. R. Wilson, reviewing studies on the genealogies concludes,

Although we have seen no anthropological evidence indicating that genealogies are created for the purpose of making a historical record, genealogies may nevertheless be considered historically accurate in the sense that they **frequently express actual domestic, political, and religious relationships**. They are, therefore, potentially valuable sources for the modern historian. However, the nature of genealogy requires that the question of historiographic worth be asked in each individual case, for only in this way can the complexities of genealogical form and function be taken

---

<sup>24</sup> It is significant that ‘all the days of’ is not duplicated in the Genesis 11 genealogy, and so this totalling in Genesis 5 is significant and demarcates the fulfilment of the curse, which was alleviated after the Flood (Gen 8:21).

<sup>25</sup> We should note that sexagesimal mathematics is rejected by some scholars; see R. K. Harrison, “From Adam to Noah: A Reconsideration of the Antediluvian Patriarchs’ Ages” *JETS* 37/2 (1994): 161-168. This dispute does not affect the point that patterns of calculation can be seen in the numbers. Kitchen notes the evidence for taking this approach lies in the SKL and certain lines which have mathematical glosses, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 445, who also rejects a sexagesimal interpretation, (446).

into account. In dealing with the issue of the historiographic value of genealogy, no generalizations are possible.<sup>26</sup> [My Emphasis.]

Although the history in the genealogy is about recording the line of descent through which the Edenic promise will be fulfilled, there is a qualification to add. The detail in Genesis 4 presupposes unrecorded population growth and this in turn requires that the ages of the ante-diluvian patriarchs be high; any formula we suggest needs to reflect this fact.

### **Conclusion**

Our conclusions are two in number: (i) the intertexts of the genealogy do not validate the use that later Jewish and Christian commentators have made of it, viz. **to date the creation of Adam and Eve**. Their creation is indeed historically recent, but we cannot date this event using this genealogy, because the purpose of the genealogy is different: the genealogy is about continuing and validating the Edenic faith. (ii) The device of giving the age of the father at the birth of the 'son' marks the time of the prophecy that there would be a son (there being sons and daughters before and after the age that is given), and it is a necessary device if some of the genealogy omits forbear(s) when connecting the 'son' of a prophecy to the father.

---

<sup>26</sup> Wilson, "The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research", 189.