

Primeval Chronology Restored: Revisiting the Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11

By Jeremy Sexton and Henry B. Smith Jr.

Prologue

For a number of years, the ABR staff has been endeavoring to conduct research on the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11. As we worked toward the launching of this important project, Pastor Jeremy Sexton was independently working on a paper, now published in *The Westminster Theological Journal*, that is very much in accord with the direction of our research. While his article reflects many of the observations we had made in the course of our research, we give Pastor Sexton full credit for his detailed work. We also thank him for republishing his entire article on the ABR website. The article that you are reading now is primarily a reiteration of Pastor Sexton's original essay, though the present article advances the argument by making several important contributions of its own. Page numbers in parenthetical references refer to the *WTJ* article, which we encourage you to read in concert with this one to contemplate the full import of our arguments. As a member of the ABR staff, I consider it a privilege to head up this project and to have Pastor Sexton make such an important contribution. ABR expects to publish many more articles on this important, ancient, and complex topic. We hope that the results will have positive ramifications in archaeology, textual criticism, anthropology, and apologetics.

Part I: Primeval Chronology Lost

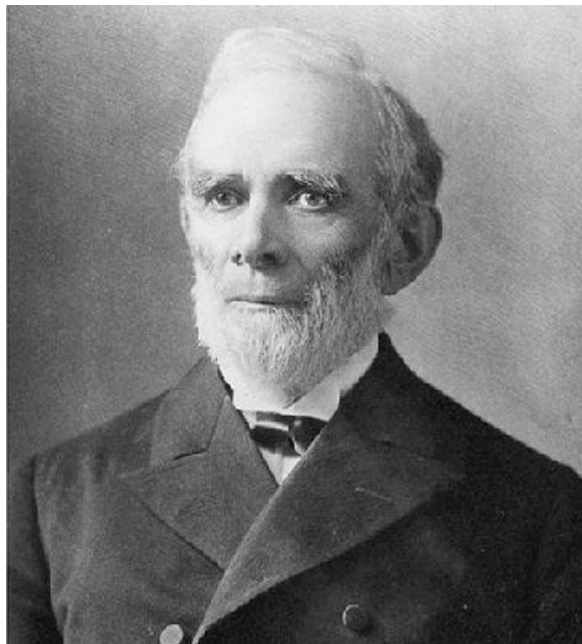
Until the latter part of the 19th century, both Jewish and Christian theologians and historiographers interpreted the genealogies of

Genesis 5:3–32 and Genesis 11:10–32 as yielding a continuous chronology of human history from the creation of Adam to the birth of Abraham. Biblical chronologists had been interpreting the genealogies in Genesis as intact chronologies since before Christ (e.g., see the histories of Demetrius and Eupolemus). This ultra-majority understanding of these biblical texts held sway for millennia.

In 1890, William Henry Green of Princeton Seminary published his influential essay *Primeval Chronology*, in which he concluded that “the Scriptures furnish no data for a chronological computation prior to the life of Abraham” (193). With vital support from B.B. Warfield, Green's theory eventually supplanted the long-held chronological view in conservative scholarship. Today, Green's article is often lauded by evangelicals as the definitive and final word on why Genesis 5 and 11 should never have been used to construct a chronology from Adam to Abraham.

Green's hypothesis is attractive to evangelicals because it removes the conflict between Scripture and the age of mankind espoused in scientific academia. According to the Masoretic Text (MT), God created Adam ca. 4000 BC; according to the Septuagint (LXX), ca. 5500 BC. Neither of these dates is acceptable to secular anthropologists. Green's interpretation also removes discrepancies between the Hebrew Bible's date for the Flood and the conventional dates for the establishment of ancient Near East (ANE) cultures. For example, the Hebrew Bible (interpreted chronologically) dates the world-

effacing Flood to ca. 2400 BC, but most ancient historians believe we can trace Egyptian civilization back to ca. 3000 BC. Chronological gaps of unknown size in Genesis 5 and 11 eliminate these two apologetic problems rather easily. Warfield surmised that these genealogies could span 200,000 years, allowing the Bible to accommodate the scientific claims of that time.¹



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William Henry Green became the chair of Biblical and Oriental Literature at Princeton Theological Seminary when he was twenty-six years old in 1851. A strong opponent of the Documentary Hypothesis, Green published numerous books and articles on the theology and authority of the Old Testament. *Primeval Chronology* is perhaps his best known work, still having a significant impact on modern evangelical scholarship.

The Case for Genealogical Gaps

In the first half of his essay, Green demonstrates that genealogies in the Bible sometimes omit unimportant links, appealing to the well-known genealogical gaps in Matthew 1:1–17 and Ezra 7:1–5 as parade examples. He also argues that the Hebrew verb *yālad* (“to bear, give birth to, bring forth, beget”) can be used of remote ancestors as well as immediate offspring. Deuteronomy 4:25 and 2 Kings 20:18 illustrate this point well (196). We have no dispute with Green so far.

We also agree with Green on an important semantic point regarding *yālad*. Green recognizes that throughout Genesis 5 and 11, the verb *yālad* (translated as “begat” in the KJV) describes the event of someone’s birth. For example, in a comment on Genesis 5:9 (“When Enosh had lived 90 years, he *begat* Kenan”), Green says that “when Enosh had lived 90 years ... [some]one was born.” Green likewise affirms in eight other places that the genealogies specify the age of each patriarch at the “birth” of a “son.” Modern OT scholars—for example, Hamilton, Waltke-O’Connor, Tov, Oswalt, Young, and Lessing-Steinmann—all concur with Green’s assessment of *yālad*. This semantic consensus is supported by several passages outside of Genesis 5 and 11 in which *yālad* refers to literal or metaphorical birth: Genesis 21:2, 3, 5, 7, 9; 40:20; Deuteronomy 4:25; 2 Kings 20:18; Isaiah 39:7; 45:10; 55:10; 59:4; 66:9; Ezekiel 16:4, 5 (195–96, 199–201). In the last ten of these verses, *yālad* occurs in the H-stem. In Genesis 5 and 11, *yālad* occurs in the H-stem all 55 times. At every begetting age given throughout Genesis 5 and 11, *someone* was born. This is undisputed. A descendent was brought to birth at the specified age of each patriarch named throughout the primeval genealogies.

Since other genealogies in Scripture omit generations, and since *yālad* can be used of descendants beyond the first generation, Green concludes in the second half of his essay that the author of Genesis 5 and 11 may have left out some “unimportant names” (202). Kenan, for example, may have been “a remote descendant of Enosh” (197). For the sake of argument, we concede Green’s point that the primeval genealogies may contain genealogical gaps.

Do Genealogical Gaps Imply Chronological Gaps?

Without explicit argument, Green asserts that if *genealogical* gaps exist in Genesis 5 and 11, then *chronological* gaps necessarily exist as well. However, an unbroken chronology does not demand an unbroken genealogy. If Seth was born when Adam was 130

(Gn 5:3), and Enosh was born when Seth was 105 (Gn 5:6), and Kenan was born when Enosh was 90 (Gn 5:9), etc., the nature of their relationships is immaterial, and the chronology remains intact. Even if Kenan was Enosh’s great-great grandson, the text still says that Kenan was born when Enosh was 90 years old. The recurring formula throughout Genesis 5 and 11—“When patriarch A had lived X years, he had [*yālad* Hiphil] patriarch B”—explicitly tells us how old each patriarch was when he brought his named descendent to birth. Table 1 uses Genesis 5:9 to illustrate the grammar of this repeated formula.

The Hiphil form of *yālad* (“he had” or “he brought to birth”) describes the actual birth of someone throughout the genealogies. Green and every other OT scholar agree on this semantic point. But whose birth does it describe, for example, in Genesis 5:9 (see Table 1)? Who was born when Enosh was 90? The untranslatable direct object marker *’et* specifies Kenan as the recipient of the verb’s action. Hence Kenan was born when Enosh was 90. And *’et* is not merely a direct object marker, but also an “emphatic particle” (Waltke-O’Connor) that stresses the noun—in this case, the name—that follows it (197, n. 37). *Kenan* was born when Enosh was 90. In Genesis 21:5; 40:20 and Ezekiel 16:4–5, which use passive forms of *yālad*, the author puts an *’et* before each verb’s passive *subject* to emphasize the one born (in the last three of these verses, *yālad* occurs in the Hophal, the passive of Hiphil). Thus Kühlewein concludes that *’et*, when used with *yālad*, identifies the person born (198, n. 137).

Is it possible that Genesis 5:9 describes the birth of someone other than Kenan? Green and advocates of his non-chronological interpretation must suppose so. To break the chronology, Green suggests that Enosh’s anonymous son (“from whom Kenan sprang”) could have been born when Enosh was 90 (198). In this scenario, Kenan is a descendant of the unnamed and unknown son born to Enosh in his 90th year; and Kenan could have been born centuries or millennia after this son was born. However, the grammar and lexical semantics indicate quite explicitly that Kenan himself was the recipient of the verb’s action, and not someone else. When Enosh was 90, Kenan received the action of *yālad* (the Hiphil form in Genesis 5:9 is *wayyôled*), that is, the action of being born. Green has created chronological gaps by inserting an unstated direct object—the unnamed son “from whom Kenan sprang”—into the text. Yet this move is semantically impermissible, and Green provides no evidence to the contrary. *The Hiphil of yālad always refers to the birth of its grammatical object, whether that object is an immediate offspring or a remote descendant* (198–201). The descendent born to Enosh in his 90th year of life cannot be anyone except Kenan. Therefore, the chronology is necessarily unbroken.

Table 1: The Grammar of Genesis 5:9

אֶת־קִינָן	וַיְהִי־לֵד	שָׁנָה	תְּשַׁעִּים	אֶנֶשׁ	וַיְהִי
Kenan	he had	years	90	Enosh	when he had lived
“When Enosh [A] had lived 90 [X] years, he had Kenan [B].”					

Green's Purposeless Begetting Ages

If the intent of Genesis 5 and 11 were to present mere genealogies, rather than chronogenealogies, then the nineteen begetting ages, one for each patriarch from Adam to Terah, serve no purpose. No other genealogy in Scripture or in any other extant ANE writing includes begetting ages (194). They are unique to the primeval genealogies. And yet according to Green, these numbers may only indicate how old the fathers were when their unnamed and (to use Green's word) "unimportant" sons were born (202), a scenario that we have already shown to be semantically impossible. Green does not explain why the author of Genesis took great pains to tell us when so many unknown and unimportant people were born. In 1896, Goodenow published a critique of Green's hypothesis, noting that this "theory *takes away all purpose* on the part of the sacred writer in giving the birth-dates he has so carefully arranged" (202). We have been unable to find any published interpretation that attempts to explain the purpose of the begetting ages aside from a chronological one.

Moreover, begetting ages are unnecessary for constructing a mere genealogy, as illustrated in Genesis 4:17–26; 10:1–32; 22:20–24; 25:1–4, 12–18; 35:23–26; 46:8–27; Exodus 6:14–25; Numbers 1; 3; 26; Ruth 4:18–22; 1 Chronicles 1–9; Ezra 7:1–5; Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38. The genealogy in Exodus 6 is especially instructive, because it even gives the fathers' life spans without using begetting ages. For example, v. 18 says, "The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, the years of the life of Kohath being 133 years." If the only goals of Genesis 5 and 11 were to record genealogies and life spans, then Genesis 5:9–11 would look like this: "Enosh had Kenan. ¹⁰And Enosh had other sons and daughters. ¹¹And all the days of Enosh were 905 years, and he died." This would be far more efficient. In reality, these verses look like this: "⁹When Enosh had lived 90 years, he had Kenan. ¹⁰And Enosh lived 815 years after he had Kenan, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹¹And all the days of Enosh were 905 years, and he died." The inspired text first specifies (v. 9a) and then accentuates (v. 10a) the year in which the important son, Kenan, was born (203).

Green contends that since the number of years that each patriarch lived after he begat his descendant is of no chronological use, and since each patriarch's age at death (given in Genesis 5 alone) is of no chronological use, we should not use *any* of the numbers for a chronological purpose. But why must we reduce all the numbers in Genesis 5 and 11 to one and the same purpose? Historically, interpreters have discerned two primary purposes of the numerical statements: to provide a chronology of humanity (and the world) and to show the deteriorating effects of sin on mankind's longevity (203).

Green believes it significant that no biblical author ever sums the years for the two epochs in Genesis 5 and 11. He notes that Scripture computes other important time spans, citing Exodus 12:40 and 1 Kings 6:1. His implicit argument is that if the interval from Adam to Abraham were important for us to know, then we might expect the Bible to compute it for us. First, however, the numbers in Exodus 12:40 and 1 Kings 6:1 are not computations of other numbers in the Bible; they are simply chronological data points, summaries of time spans. We could not deduce these numbers from the rest of Scripture. Second, and related, Green

fails to recognize that each begetting age in Genesis 5 and 11 is similarly a chronological data point, a summary of a time span. We could not deduce any of the begetting ages from the rest of Scripture. Adding together the begetting ages in Genesis 5:3, 5:6, 5:9, etc., to determine the interval between Adam and Abraham is no different in principle from adding together the numbers in Exodus 12:40 and 1 Kings 6:1 to determine the interval between the beginning of Israel's sojourning and the beginning of the temple's construction. The "430 years" in Exodus 12:40 is like the "130 years" in Genesis 5:3 and the "105 years" in Genesis 5:6, and so on. Green would have us believe that the "430 years" in Exodus 12:40 is like the sum of all the begetting ages; then he can point out that such a sum does not exist in Scripture. Third, Green himself recognizes that Scripture does not even total all the important intervals *within the primeval genealogies themselves*. Genesis 11 does not provide the total years of each father's life, but still Green believes that the life span of each postdiluvian can be deduced by adding his begetting age to the number of years he lived after his son's birth. If these life spans are important, as Green affirms, even though Scripture does not compute them, so also might the overall chronology be important, even though Scripture does not compute it. Green implies that the Bible sums significant time spans for us, and yet the Bible does not even sum several significant time spans within the genealogies themselves. Fourth, that no biblical author ever totals the timeline in Genesis 5 and 11 is ultimately irrelevant, because the semantics, grammar, and syntax of the genealogies inescapably link the begetting ages together chronologically, as we have shown.

Green says that "each genealogy includes ten names, Noah being the tenth from Adam, and Terah the tenth from Noah," and concludes that "the symmetry of these primitive genealogies is artificial" (203–204). Of course, a ten-ten structure, if we assumed it to be artificial, would only entail genealogical gaps, not chronological ones, so this is a moot point. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) of Genesis 11 consist of only nine names, not ten. To make the structure appear symmetrical, Green includes Noah in both genealogies, even though Noah's name appears nowhere in Genesis 11. Later Green corrected this error (204). One might count Abram in the second genealogy (Gn 11:26), but then to be consistent he must include Shem in the first one (Gn 5:32), giving Genesis 5 eleven links instead of ten. A ten-ten symmetry is unachievable in the MT and in the SP (204, n. 68).

Furthermore, Green's argument yields the most incredible of coincidences. On Green's hypothesis, we cannot know when Methuselah died in relation to the Flood, because we cannot know the gap of time between him and Noah. Accordingly, Methuselah could have died thousands of years before the Flood. But when we subject the begetting ages in MT Genesis 5 to chronological computation, Methuselah dies in the very year of the Flood. If chronological computation were truly unwarranted, as Green insists, Methuselah's death in the year of the Flood would be an unbelievable coincidence of the chronological interpretation. To get around this, one might concede that a chronological construction is permissible from Methuselah to Lamech to Noah, but nowhere else. However, this requires extreme special pleading. The syntax of these verses (Gn 5:25–

29) is identical to that of the previous verses (Gn 5:3–24). The chronological intent of Genesis 5:25–29 places Green’s 1890 proposal in a profound exegetical quandary, of which Green seemed unaware. The simplest explanation of the data is that the author of the primeval history provided all the begetting ages, not just Methuselah’s and Lamech’s, for chronological computation (204).

Green may have shown the possibility of *genealogical* gaps, but he failed to establish the possibility of *chronological* gaps. He failed to demonstrate that *yālad*, in the case of a genealogical gap, may describe the birth of the named descendant’s unnamed ancestor. He failed to explain why *yālad* does not necessarily describe the birth of its named object throughout Genesis 5 and 11, even though it does everywhere else in the Hebrew Bible, including in places where the verb’s object refers to remote descendants (Dt 4:25; 2 Kgs 20:18). He failed to provide a purpose for the unique and carefully placed begetting ages. Finally, he failed to account for the striking coincidence (so it is on his premises) discussed in the previous paragraph (205).

Part II: A Case for the Septuagint’s Primeval Chronology

Green’s hypothesis, which left the begetting ages with no purpose, effectively halted any serious discussion among conservative scholars on the numerical divergences in the three main textual witnesses of Genesis 5 and 11 (MT, LXX, SP). Most evangelicals have lost all interest in the text-critical issues related to the begetting ages and have simply accepted the figures in the MT. Those who do discuss the textual differences tend to repeat superficial arguments for the MT. The pro-MT position on Genesis 5 and 11, however, is primarily a post-Reformation phenomenon (210). The overwhelming majority of Christians before the Reformation subscribed to the Septuagint’s primeval chronology. The Reformers, in their zeal for returning “to the sources,” uncritically accepted the begetting ages in the MT. But many Bible-believing chronologists during the centuries after the Reformation argued that the ancient Jews and historic church were correct all along, concluding that the LXX fundamentally preserves the original chronology and that the numbers in the MT are the result of a second-century corruption (210, 212). In fact, no known historical work written before the second century AD reflects the MT’s timeline. While we maintain that the MT is generally reliable, the doctrine of preservation does not demand that only the MT preserves the OT. Scripture contains many promises that God will preserve His Word, but it does not specify exactly how He will do so. God does not promise to preserve the Scriptures in only one textual tradition. Bible-believing Christians are at liberty to consider the compelling text-critical arguments for the numbers in LXX Genesis 5 and 11. The following material outlines some of the external and internal evidences for the authenticity of the Septuagint’s primeval chronology.

External Evidence for LXX Genesis 5 and 11

Table 2 on the next page shows how the begetting ages vary among the three textual witnesses, along with Josephus. While

a few of the minor differences may be ascribed to accidental errors, scholars universally acknowledge that the divergences of 100 years and 50 years signify deliberate alterations of the text. The LXX (with its higher begetting ages) dates Noah’s flood 780 years earlier, and the creation of Adam 1,386 years earlier, than the MT does. These differences are quite significant, especially when we attempt to evaluate and date archaeological evidence between the Flood and Abraham.

The higher begetting ages in the LXX go all the way back to when the Jewish scribes in Alexandria, Egypt, originally translated the Torah into Greek (ca. 280 BC). This means one of two things: either (a) the LXX translators used a Hebrew text with the higher begetting ages in it or (b) the LXX translators fabricated the higher begetting ages. If (a) is true, it means that a very old Hebrew text contained the longer chronology. To avoid this conclusion, many proponents of the MT have assumed that (b) must be true, speculating that the Alexandrian translators intentionally inflated the chronology to reconcile it with Egyptian history. Although no ancient evidence supports this supposition, scholars have often repeated it as established fact anyway. (To bolster this bald assertion, many also have accused the Alexandrian Jews of maintaining less reverence for the text than the Palestinian Jews, even though there is no historical support for this characterization either.) A desire to reconcile biblical history with Egyptian chronology cannot account for such a grand-scale corruption of the sacred text, an egregious violation of Deuteronomy 4:2. The Septuagint exhibits no inclination to accommodate any aspect of Egyptian cosmogony, theogony, or anthropogony. There is no reason to think that the Jewish scribes in Alexandria would capitulate to Egyptian worldview claims *only in the area of primeval chronology*. Additionally, it is inexplicable that the Alexandrian scribes would imagine that they could get away with introducing such a horrendous and impious fraud into the biblical text. It is impossible that they would have gotten away with it. The ancient Jews, who prized their chronologies and genealogies, never would have forgiven a deliberate textual alteration of this magnitude in the foundational chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11. And yet for four hundred years this corruption supposedly was not just overlooked, but also adopted by all the Jewish historians of that time (see below). Such a scenario is utterly implausible.

Until the second century AD, the Jews universally regarded the Greek translation of the OT as a faithful interpretation of the original Hebrew.² Philo and Josephus lauded the Greek version, the Sanhedrin authorized it to be read in the Greek-speaking synagogues, and the apostles quoted from it freely. Russell notes that “before the second century of the Christian religion, no traces can be found of any controversy as to the differences supposed to exist in the Greek and Hebrew texts of the sacred books” (216, n. 129). The unanimous Jewish approval of the LXX during the first four centuries of its existence can only be explained if it was a generally accurate translation of the Hebrew text in circulation during that time. What happened in the second century? The Palestinian Jews suddenly began repudiating the original translation of the Greek OT and replacing it with new translations (by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion). We shall explore the reasons for this presently.

A major problem with the LXX inflation hypothesis, in

Table 2: The Begetting Ages of Genesis 5 and 11

	MT	LXX	SP	Josephus
Adam	130	230	130	230
Seth	105	205	105	205
Enosh	90	190	90	190
Kenan	70	170	70	170
Mahalalel	65	165	65	165
Jared	162	162	62	162
Enoch	65	165	65	165
Methuselah	187	187	67	187
Lamech	182	188	53	182
Noah	500	500	500	—
Shem	100	100	100	—
Arpachshad	35	135	135	135
Cainan	—	130	—	—
Shelah	30	130	130	130
Eber	34	134	134	134
Peleg	30	130	130	130
Reu	32	132	132	132
Serug	30	130	130	132
Nahor	29	79	79	120
Terah	70	70	70	70

addition to the complete lack of historical evidence for it, is that it cannot account for the allegedly inflated siring ages in SP Genesis 11, which match those in LXX Genesis 11 exactly. The SP scribes, known for their sectarian tendencies, were not driven to compete with Egyptian chronology; they probably had no knowledge of it. And the source of the higher begetting ages in the Hebrew text of SP Genesis 11 is certainly not the Greek text of LXX Genesis 11. There is no evidence that the SP is in any way dependent on the LXX for its higher begetting ages, and much evidence suggests the independence of these two major textual witnesses, especially regarding the primeval chronologies. In Genesis 5, the SP's chronology differs drastically from the LXX's (see Table 2). In Genesis 11, two important differences corroborate the independence of the SP and the LXX: unlike the

SP, the LXX includes the generation of Cainan (cf. Lk 3:36) and leaves out the total years of each patriarch's life. What are the chances that these two independent textual traditions inflated the begetting ages of Genesis 11 identically? The begetting ages in the LXX and the SP of Genesis 11 go back to a common Hebrew text—a text that dates back at least to the translation of the LXX in ca. 280 BC.

The LXX inflation hypothesis also bypasses the significant strides made during the past century in Septuagint studies, a broad area of research that requires much more attention in evangelical scholarship. For example, textual scholars generally recognize that LXX Genesis was translated from a Hebrew text (*Vorlage*) that differs from the MT in numerous places (212). Tov, Hendel, Klostermann, and many others have demonstrated that

the numbers in LXX Genesis 5 and 11 should be ascribed to the *Vorlage*, not to the Alexandrian translators (213).

Evidence abounds for the existence of the LXX's longer chronology in the Hebrew texts circulating during the centuries before and the century after Christ's birth. Jewish historians Demetrius (ca. 200 BC) and Eupolemus (ca. 160 BC) bear witness to the Septuagint's siring ages. Eupolemus had access to both the Hebrew text and the LXX, which apparently contained the same numbers, for Eupolemus was a Palestinian Jew who would not have used in his chronology the Greek's higher numbers if they did not also exist in the Hebrew. The higher begetting ages also appear in Josephus (*Ant.* 1.67, 83–87, 149–50). This is highly significant historical evidence, since Josephus explicitly states that he worked from the Hebrew text (*Ant.* 10.218; *Ag. Ap.* 1.1). The only numbers in Josephus that match the MT are known corruptions of summation figures in *Ant.* 1.82 and 1.148. The subsequent lists of begetting ages in *Ant.* 1.83–87 and 1.149–50 essentially match the LXX's numbers (see Table 2). Altering the begetting age of each patriarch in the lists that followed would have been too difficult, so only the summation figures were changed. These reduced totals are blatant attempts to alter Josephus towards the MT. In accordance with the longer chronology, Josephus states that the history recorded in the Hebrew Bible—a history that commences with creation and terminates more than 400 years before Christ—covers 5,000 years: “Those antiquities contain the history of five thousand years; and they are taken out of our sacred books, but translated by me into the Greek tongue” (*Ag. Ap.* 1.1). The MT's timeline, which does not show up in any witness before the second century AD, appears to be a calculated reduction of the original chronology, which existed in Hebrew texts until the second century AD (213–14).

The ancient Jewish witnesses betray no demonstrable attempt to inflate biblical or intertestamental chronology. However, the Jewish tendency toward chronological *deflation* is demonstrated in several places: (1) the scribal reductions in Josephus toward the MT's chronology, discussed above; (2) the SP's antediluvian chronology, which is 349 years shorter than the MT's; (3) the antediluvian chronology in *Jubilees*, which closely resembles

the deflated one in the SP; (4) a lost Hebrew text that Whiston calls “Jerome's Samaritan [Pentateuch]” and that Jackson calls “the Babylonian Hebrew Text...followed by the Eastern Jews,” whose antediluvian chronology was 100 years shorter than the MT's (cf. endnote 4); and (5) the *Seder Olam Rabbah*, a famous second-century Jewish chronology that reduces postexilic history by about 185 years (214–15).

The *Seder Olam Rabbah*, known for its severe reduction of the timeline between the exile and Christ, is the earliest witness to the chronology in MT Genesis 5 and 11. That is, the earliest witness to the MT's begetting ages is a corrupted second-century Jewish history that reduces postexilic chronology to avoid the Christian interpretation of the Messianic prophecy in Daniel 9:26 (see below). Even aside from considerations of the *Seder Olam*'s compromised nature, the earliest witness to the longer chronology (LXX) predates the earliest witness to the MT's shorter chronology by about 400 years. If the MT's chronology is original, why did it disappear until the second century AD, and why did the longer chronology prevail in both Hebrew and Greek sources until then? Any defender of the MT's numbers must address this question first (215–16).

What could have motivated the second-century Jews to deflate their sacred chronology so significantly? Prevalent among Jews and early Christians was the belief that the Messiah would arrive during the sixth millennium after creation, between AM 5000 and AM 6000 (AM = Anno Mundi, “in the year of the world”). The Babylonian Talmud further suggests that according to some Jews, “the period of the Messiah” spanned from AM 4000 to AM 6000 (216). The LXX's chronology puts the birth of Jesus at ca.

AM 5500, clearly “qualifying” him (with respect to the age of the world) to be the Messiah. Many scholars have argued that the Palestinian Jews living in the second century AD shortened the chronology to remove Jesus from the sixth millennium of the world, thereby disqualifying Him as the Messiah (215–16, n. 129). This reduction is likely reflected in the *Seder Olam*, which (dating creation to 3761 BC) even manages to put Jesus outside “the period of the Messiah,” while situating the second-century Jews right on the verge of it. After all, the authors of the *Seder*



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Romanticized image of Flavius Josephus, born Joseph ben Matityahu. His work, *Antiquities of the Jews*, details the history of the Jewish people from the creation of the world until his own time, ca. AD 94. His work is an important first century AD witness to the numbers found in the primeval chronology.

Olam were not opposed to manipulating Jewish chronology for Messianic (anti-Christian) reasons, for they indisputably reduced the interval between the Babylonian captivity and the Second Temple's destruction by about 185 years, supporting the Jewish attempt to correlate the Messianic prophecy in Daniel 9:26 with the events of AD 70 instead of with Jesus Christ.

We propose, then, an adequate motive for Palestinian Jewish scribes to alter the sacred text, a motive that is supported by historical and theological evidence: discrediting the Lord Jesus as Messiah.

Judaism was facing a crisis of biblical proportions (literally) during the second century of the Christian era. The gospel of Messiah Jesus was spreading like wildfire across the Roman world, the Temple had been razed to the ground, and the holy city of God had been burned. The rest of Israel had been ravaged by Roman aggression in the events of AD 66–73 and AD 132–136. The small core of Judaism that rose from the ashes had complete and autonomous control over the Hebrew manuscripts that survived the Roman devastations,³ providing ample opportunity for wholesale chronological changes that would go undetectable in later copies. Most of the world around them would have been unable to read the Hebrew texts, greatly minimizing their usefulness and dissemination outside of Palestinian Judaism. These remaining manuscripts were the precursors to the Masoretic Text, which solidified during the last part of the first millennium AD. The circumstances in Palestine during the middle of the second century AD provided an ideal opportunity for the keepers of the remaining Jewish Scriptures to corrupt their texts without leaving behind a trail of evidence in the Hebrew manuscripts.

Numerous church fathers testify to the lengths to which orthodox Judaism went to discredit Jesus' Messianic office, a phenomenon also recorded throughout the book of Acts. Justin Martyr says that the Rabbis deliberately expunged or altered Messianic verses from their Scriptures in their project of discrediting Lord Jesus as Messiah (e.g., see *Dial.* 71). According to Justin, the second-century Jews were still promulgating the lie that the disciples had stolen Christ's body from the tomb (cf. Mt 28:13–15). Augustine writes that "the Jews, envying us for our translation of their Law and Prophets, have made alterations in their texts to undermine the authority of ours" (*Civ.* 15.11). In a spiritual context that included the crucifixion of Jesus, the murder of Stephen, the attempted murder of Paul, virulent second-century opposition to the gospel, and a willingness to alter and even take away from the words of Scripture, the deliberate corruption of the primeval chronology easily falls within the realm of possibility.

The theory that the second-century Palestinian Jews deflated the primeval chronology for anti-Christian reasons supplies the motive, means, and opportunity that no other theory can.

Internal Evidence for LXX Genesis 5 and 11

A critical analysis of the internal data confirms that the aim of the textual alterations in Genesis 5 and 11 was chronological deflation. Comparing the MT and the LXX in Table 2, we see 100-year adjustments for the begetting ages of Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Enoch, Arpachshad, Shelah, Eber,

Peleg, Reu, and Serug; a 50-year adjustment for the begetting age of Nahor; and essentially no adjustments for the begetting ages of Jared, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Shem, and Terah. The scope of these alterations suggests that they are the products of a systematic chronological reduction. Consider that the task of deflating the primeval chronology would face definite limitations. For example, a chronological deflation would be unable to subtract 100 years from every begetting age, because to do so would imply that patriarchs besides Noah lived beyond the Flood. This limitation is on display in the MT, whose begetting ages for Methuselah and Lamech remain high, barely allowing these two antediluvians to avoid outliving the worldwide Deluge.⁴ (The numbers for Noah, Shem, and Terah had to remain unaltered, because their lives are intertwined with numerous other chronological texts.) Chronological deflation was also limited in the number of years it could uniformly reduce the begetting ages that were altered; a reduction of more than 100 years would have made the postdiluvians too young. On the other hand, if we understand that the adjustments to the chronology are the products of systematic inflation, we do not find the supposedly enlarged begetting ages bumping up against limitations in the same way. The LXX's chronology could be made much longer than it is without causing any problems. One could increase the lower begetting ages in the MT by far more than 100 years (or in Nahor's case, by far more than 50 years) without creating inconsistencies.

Nahor's begetting age, which reads 79 in the LXX/SP and 29 in the MT, serves as strong internal evidence for deliberate chronological deflation. If we assume that the MT preserves Nahor's original begetting age, and that the LXX/SP number is the result of chronological inflation, *we must ask why the corruptors only added 50 years this time instead of 100.* Nothing prevented them from increasing Nahor's begetting age by 100 instead of 50. So Nahor's begetting age in LXX/SP should be 129, not 79. Not only would 129 have been consistent with the alleged 100-year inflations elsewhere in the primeval chronology, but this number would also fit in better with the previous LXX/SP begetting ages in Genesis 11. Now consider that if the goal of the alterations was deflation, and if Nahor's original begetting age was 79, then the Jewish scribes realistically could only reduce this number by 50 years to 29. Perhaps they could have pushed the issue and lowered it to 19, but 29 (already the lowest begetting age in the genealogies) is more consistent with the rest of the MT's numbers from Arpachshad to Serug. The 50-year adjustment of Nahor's begetting age can only be explained as an intentional chronological deflation.

Ultimately, the MT could not avoid bearing some signs of its monumental chronological reduction. For example, a significant problem arises in Genesis 25:8, which says that the 175-year-old Abraham "died in a good old age, an old man and full of years," even though Eber was still alive and far more than twice Abraham's age at this point, according to the MT. Similarly, Shem's death at 600 occurs in the MT just before (or just after by some reckonings) Abraham's death at 175. In the LXX, however, Shem had been dead for about eight centuries, and Eber for about four, when Abraham died, and life spans had dropped to the point where Genesis 25:8 becomes coherent. We also might ask why Terah was the only patriarch who went

with Abraham “to go into the land of Canaan” (Gn 11:31) if, as the MT necessitates, four other fathers in the line of promise—namely Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah, and Eber—were still alive at the time. Naturally, it makes immediate sense that Terah was the only patriarch who went with Abraham if, as in the LXX, Terah was Abraham’s only living ancestor at that point.

The careful selection of the begetting ages that were altered, as well as the amount that each number was adjusted, confirms that the chronology was reduced. The internal evidence fits precisely and solely with the goal of chronological deflation.

A Popular But Misguided Objection

Many reject out of hand the Septuagint’s primeval chronology because some LXX manuscripts contain 167 for the begetting age of Methuselah, putting his death 14 years after the Flood. However, other LXX manuscripts (such as Codexes Alexandrinus, Cottonianus, and Coislinianus) contain Methuselah’s correct begetting age of 187, putting his death six years before the Flood.⁵ And our oldest LXX-based chronology, written by Demetrius in the third century BC, implies 187, which is also attested by Eupolemus (second century BC), Josephus, and the MT (211). It is unlikely that the LXX translators intentionally lowered Methuselah’s begetting age from the original 187 to 167. Such a move would be inexplicable, especially since the Septuagint’s begetting ages are always higher than the Hebrew variants. The external and internal evidence has led many scholars in the last few hundred years (including E.H. Merrill recently) to conclude that the original begetting age for Methuselah in the LXX was 187, and that 167 is a later transmissional error (211).⁶ Yet even if the original Greek translation did read 167, the only plausible explanation for this would be that it was an accident. For by everyone’s account, the Greek translators were not motivated to reduce the chronology, and we have no reason to think that they deliberately put Methuselah’s death beyond the Flood. An accidental alteration from 187 to 167 by the original scribe would have no bearing on the case for the anteriority and superiority of the overall chronology in LXX Genesis 5 and 11. Appealing to the variant 167 in an attempt to discredit the LXX is merely a distraction from the real text-critical issues.

Conclusion

Our thesis on the text of Genesis 5 and 11 is far from being new. It has a long pedigree in the Christian church. We remain open in principle to other proposals that attempt to explain the numerical divergences, but so far we have seen no other theory that makes room for all the textual and historical data. The Jewish attempt to discredit Jesus as the Messiah is to our knowledge the only explanation with enough explanatory power to account for the deliberate chronological alterations in Genesis 5 and 11. According to the Septuagint’s chronology, the creation of Adam dates to ca. 5500 BC, and the Flood to ca. 3200 BC. A secure Flood date derived from Scripture would establish a reliable framework for dating archaeological remains from the pre-Abrahamic era.

Further research must be conducted in a variety of areas to support or falsify the direction of our thesis. The literature and

potential subject matter is massive. We welcome prayers and constructive feedback from our supporters. Suggestions in the spirit of Christian scholarship and charity can be sent to the following address: comments@biblearchaeology.org.

This article is largely based on “Who Was Born When Enosh Was 90? A Semantic Reevaluation of William Henry Green’s Chronological Gaps,” published in *The Westminster Theological Journal* 77/2 (2015), 193–218. It has been republished on the ABR website, www.BibleArchaeology.org, and can be accessed by entering “Enosh” into the article search box at the top right of the ABR homepage.

Notes

¹ Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Manner and Time of Man’s Origin,” in B.B. Warfield: *Evolution, Science, and Scripture: Selected Writings*, ed. David N. Livingstone and Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), 222.

² A Greek version of the OT existed before the apostolic era. The term “Septuagint” or “LXX” technically refers only to the Greek Pentateuch, translated ca. 280 BC by the Jews in Alexandria, Egypt. The remaining books of the Hebrew Bible were translated into Greek by different people in various places over the next few centuries; these books go by the term “Old Greek” or “OG.” The LXX and OG compose the original Greek OT, which should be distinguished, at least in principle, from the revisions and new translations that the Jews produced during the second century AD.

³ In particular, Rabbi Akiba had the authority and power to order the removal of older MSS and institute the use of new ones. See Étienne Nodet, “Josephus and the Pentateuch,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 28, no. 2 (May 1997): 193.

⁴ Jared’s begetting age is the only higher one remaining in the MT that could have been reduced by 100, from 162 to 62, without creating problems. In fact, Whiston, Jackson, Russell, and Goodenow point to a lost Hebrew text, “Jerome’s Samaritan,” likely an early version of the Samaritan Pentateuch, whose antediluvian chronology is 100 years shorter than the MT’s. It appears that Jared’s begetting age was reduced by 100 in this Hebrew text, thereby carrying the MT’s reductional scheme “to its utmost practicable limits” (215, n. 125). Jared’s reduced siring age of 62 survives in the SP (see Table 2).

⁵ For a complete list of extant textual witnesses to LXX Genesis 5 and 11, see Paul J. Ray, “An Evaluation of the Numerical Variants of the Chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11,” *Origins* 12/1 (1985): 26–37.

⁶ See also Alan England Brooke and Norman McLean, ed., *The Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906), 1:12.

Jeremy Sexton is pastor of the Church of the Good Shepherd in North Augusta, SC, and a chaplain in the Air Force Reserve. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Religion (with an emphasis in biblical languages) from Missouri Baptist University and a Master of Divinity from Covenant Theological Seminary. He and his wife Brandy have six boys and one girl.



Henry B. Smith Jr. is the Administrative Director of the Khirbet el-Maqatir and Shiloh Archaeological Excavations, Israel. He also serves the ABR ministry in a writing and research capacity. He graduated from Trinity Seminary with an MA in 2005, and Westminster Seminary with an MAR in 2015. He lives with his wife Birzavit and daughter Ava in PA.

