

BIBLE and SPADE

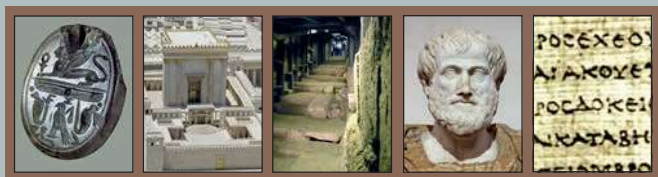
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WHO DETERMINES OUR INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE?

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

Ephesians 4:11-14



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FROM THE DESK OF HENRY B SMITH JR

It is nonsense to speak of the unique and total authority of Scripture at the same time as we change our interpretation of Scripture to accord with theories drawn from outside Scripture... The basic question is whether our interpretation of the Bible is to be determined by the Bible itself or by some other authority.

– Noel K. Weeks

Hermeneutics is “that science which delineates principles or methods for interpreting an individual author’s meaning.” In the case of the Bible, certain men were chosen by God to be the immediate authors of the sacred text. However, the ultimate author was God the Holy Spirit. Thus, biblical hermeneutics seeks to understand God’s original intended meaning. Hermeneutics is therefore a sacred act and the method which we employ is a profoundly serious spiritual and ethical matter.

Bible and Spade readers are likely familiar with ABR’s position that the Bible holds priority over interpretations of evidence discovered in the realm of archaeology and other scientific disciplines. We do not hold that priority arbitrarily, nor do we base it on our own personal preferences. The priority of Scripture is generated by Scripture itself as the authoritative, inerrant, infallible Word of the living, eternal, incorruptible God. God’s intended meaning is ascertained through careful examination of the biblical text, interpreted within the larger context of the 66 books of the biblical canon. Indeed, “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself...”

We sometimes refer to this method as a “canonical hermeneutic,” though other terms are also employed (such as a redemptive–historical hermeneutic). A canonical hermeneutic provides legitimate and trustworthy boundaries because it is God Himself who is providing the framework for evangelicals to interpret His Word. A canonical hermeneutic also dictates how archaeology is to be compared to Scripture. Archaeological evidence can be used to supplement or amplify the meaning of the sacred text and its associated historical background. However, archaeological interpretations are never to be considered “equal to” or “over” the biblical text in terms of their evidential value, truthfulness, interpretive priority, or authority. The biblical text and its canonical context are masters of the interpretative process, and the relevant ancient Near Eastern (ANE) context and archaeological evidence are subservient to the biblical text.

Unfortunately, evangelical OT scholars largely employ a hermeneutical method that is markedly different than the one I have just described. We can refer to this method as

the “ancient Near Eastern hermeneutic,” or, “the comparative archaeological method.” What do we mean by the comparative archaeological method (CAM)? Stated simply, the biblical text is compared to external evidence discovered by ANE archaeologists and historians. Then, conclusions are drawn about the meaning of the text in relation to scholarly interpretations of the external data. These comparisons should immediately raise questions, such as:

- What/Who retains the final authority over and in the hermeneutical process?
- Does the canon of Scripture generate its own hermeneutical boundaries and authoritative method?
- How should we respond when interpretations of external evidence directly contradict the biblical text?
- Do Christians have any sure hermeneutical ground to stand on, or are we free to choose our hermeneutical method like we choose hats?

Many similar questions could, *and should*, be asked. Here, I will outline features of CAM which are highly problematic for evangelical scholars professing to hold a high view of Scripture. I will expand on these points in the next issue of *Bible and Spade*.

1. CAM divorces the Bible from orthodox, Christian confessional commitments. That is, biblical texts are treated as if they are not coherently and theologically interrelated throughout the OT and NT canon. For example, what the Apostle Paul has to say about Abraham’s fathering age of 100 years in Genesis 17:17 is considered irrelevant (Rom. 4:19).

2. CAM accepts “the claim of humanistic thought that its scholarship is religiously neutral when the Bible teaches us that no man is religiously neutral.” CAM also ignores the impact that unbelief and sinfulness have on human interpretations of archaeological and historical evidence intersecting with the Bible (Rom. 1:16ff). CAM is philosophically naïve at best, subversive at worst.

3. CAM attempts to treat the Bible as a neutral object of scientific study, as if it were “just another ancient book.” The Bible itself explicitly denies such a designation (Deut. 4:8; Ps. 19:7; 119:1–176; 147:19–20; II Tim. 3:16; Rom. 3:2; II Pet. 1:19, 21; I John 5:9; I Thes. 2:13; Lk. 16:29, 31; 24:27, 44; Eph. 2:20; Rev. 22:18–19). Scripture is utterly unique: it is the speech of the Creator of the universe.

4. CAM makes Scripture’s meaning dependent on an elite circle of scholarly authorities who must add their personal interpretations of ANE evidence to the biblical text before it can be understood as God intended. It establishes an ANE papacy which stands between the Scriptures and the Church.

5. CAM inherently denies three attributes of Scripture. It denies Scripture’s authority because another authority, the

The comparative archaeological method (CAM) means that scholars compare the biblical text to evidence discovered by archaeologists and historians then draw conclusions about what the text means. Is this unbiased and reliable?

ANE scholar, is required to understand the text correctly. Since the Bible has only become understandable in the modern day, Scripture is inherently unclear. As such, CAM denies the doctrine of clarity. CAM also denies Scripture's sufficiency because the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture and illuminating the converted reader is no longer adequate for accurate interpretation.

6. CAM leaves the Bible open to an almost endless variety of interpretive choices, often based on personal preferences. Why? Because CAM establishes virtually no methodological boundaries. As a result, evangelical OT scholarship has become a "hermeneutical wild west."

7. CAM *centers the interpretive authority of the Bible in the mind of fallen, sinful man*, not God.

CAM and the "Problem" of the Patriarchal Lifespans

We have forgotten that the church has always been under pressure to allegorize Genesis so that it may conform with Plotinus or Aristotle or some other human philosophy. We have treated the problem as though it were a modern one, as though we alone have had to face the onerous task of holding to a view of cosmic and human origins which is out of sympathy with the philosophical premises of our culture.

—Noel K. Weeks

CAM's problems grow exceptionally acute when dealing with Genesis 1–11, which describes the origin of the universe, earth, animal kingdom, and mankind. Its universal scope—the origin and fall of man, Noah's Flood, the Table of Nations, and the language confusion at Babel—put these eleven chapters in explicit conflict with modern-day worldview paradigms. In particular, the patriarchal lifespans in Genesis directly contradict prevailing evolutionary theories about human origins. Adam lived to 930 years of age, Methuselah to 969 years, and Noah to 950 years. After the Flood, lifespans were gradually reduced from Shem's 600 years down to Abraham's 175 years.

These figures seem quite extraordinary on the surface, so most evangelical scholars try to reinterpret them. Some believe the key to understanding them can be found in ANE texts, cultural practices, or the sixty based mathematical system of Mesopotamia. Others believe they are part of a secret numerical system, known only to its original author(s). Some evangelicals claim we may/can never know their true meaning. Still others believe Genesis 1–11 should be classified as "mytho-history," with the lifespans conveniently falling into the "mytho" category.

These interpretations reveal a common theme: each hermeneutical method is grounded in an external authority structure. That is, something outside of Scripture must necessarily be added to Scripture for the reader to understand Scripture. And this "something" must be discovered, interpreted, and mediated to the Church by a specialist. In every case, the result is the same: *these evangelical hermeneutical methods are grounded in the mind of fallen, sinful man.*

The ultimate author of the Bible is God the Holy Spirit. Biblical hermeneutics seeks to understand God's original intended meaning. It is therefore a sacred act and the method which we employ is a profoundly serious spiritual and ethical matter.

The desire to reinterpret the patriarchal lifespans in order to make them palatable to the unsaved mind is not new. 1600 years ago, Augustine confronted the same identical problem in *City of God*. Compared to some portions of the OT, the passages containing the lifespans in Genesis are fairly easy to interpret, and the standard English translations accurately represent the Hebrew original. A careful and extended exegetical study of the text alone can yield no other result: the lifespans are literal. When considered in the scope of God's redemptive plan, it is perfectly reasonable to accept the numbers as actual lifespans. Man was originally in a state of moral and physical perfection from the moment of his creation. After rebelling against his Creator, man was subjected to spiritual exile from God and eventual physical death. But his physical deterioration and eventual death took place over time. Many centuries, in fact. The Fall led to the cataclysmic judgment of the Flood, and human lifespans drastically fell off thereafter. Reduced lifespans are the consequence of sin, the gradual working out of God's wrath against human rebellion over several millennia. But man was originally created to live forever.

The "problem" here is not the patriarchal lifespans: it is evangelicalism's failure to carefully interpret them in their canonical context and believe what they unambiguously say. Man centered authorities must be brought in to enlighten us about what God really meant.

In all these efforts to reinterpret the numbers in Genesis, one cannot help but hear the slithering sound of the very first outside authority emanating from Genesis 3:1— "Did God Really Say?"

In closing, I urge my fellow evangelicals to jettison these faulty hermeneutical methods and prayerfully consider the admonition of Martin Luther:

If you cannot understand how this could have been done... *then grant the Holy Spirit the honor of being more learned than you are.* For you are to deal with Scripture in such a way that you bear in mind that God Himself says what is written. But since God is speaking, it is not fitting for you wantonly to turn His Word in the direction you wish to go.

This article serves as an introduction to a more in-depth treatment of this subject, scheduled to appear in the Winter and Spring 2021 issues of *Bible and Spade*. In that article, I will expand on the insurmountable problems with CAM, using Ai (Joshua 7-8) as a case study. Hermeneutical methods advocating the reinterpretation of the patriarchal lifespans will be critiqued from an exegetical, hermeneutical, and theological perspective. *This article is part of the ongoing Genesis 5 and 11 Research Project.*

WILD WEST EVANGELICAL HERMENEUTICS

PART ONE: THE FAILURE OF THE COMPARATIVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHOD

HENRY B. SMITH JR.

Evangelical scholars are disposed to use hermeneutical procedures originally developed on the basis of *non-Christian presuppositions*. They make minimal changes to these procedures, of course, to avoid directly denying the possibility of miracles or the divine authority of Scripture. But minimal changes are not enough. We ought to be rethinking the entire process of interpretation on the basis of sound presuppositions.¹

—Vern S. Poythress

HERMENEUTICS AND COMPARATIVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHOD

Hermeneutics is “that science which delineates principles or methods for interpreting an individual author’s meaning.”² In the case of the Bible, certain men were chosen by God to be the immediate authors of the biblical text. However, the ultimate author of all of Scripture was God the Holy Spirit (1 Pt 1:20–21; 2 Tm 3:16; 1 Pt. 1:11; Mk 12:36 = Ps. 110:1; 2 Sm 23:2). Biblical hermeneutics seeks to understand *God’s* original intended meaning of the sacred text. Engaging in hermeneutics is a sacrosanct act, performed *coram Deo*. Therefore, the method that the professing Christian employs is a very serious spiritual and ethical matter.

Before we explore hermeneutics further, let us look at “comparative archaeological method” (CAM). Stated in its simplest form, it compares the text of Scripture to external evidence discovered by ANE archaeologists and historians. Then, conclusions are drawn about how our interpretation(s) of the external evidence should influence our exegesis and interpretation of the biblical text. The process of applying CAM to Scripture requires us to think about hermeneutics and the method we should employ.

Comparative Archaeological Method (CAM):
Comparing the text of Scripture to external evidence discovered by ancient Near East (ANE) archaeologists and historians, then drawing conclusions about how this evidence should influence the interpretation of the biblical text.

Drawing comparisons between sacred Scripture and external evidence immediately raises important questions:

- What hermeneutical method should we employ once we begin drawing comparisons between Scripture and the external evidence?
- Where is the locus of authority in the hermeneutical/comparative process?
- What parameters should guide our interpretative methodology? In other words, do Christians have any sure hermeneutical ground on which to stand, or are they free to choose their own preferred hermeneutical methods?
- Does the canon of Scripture generate its own hermeneutical boundaries and authoritative method? If so, are Christian scholars adhering to it?

CAM was chiefly instigated and developed in modern times by world-renowned archaeologist William F. Albright (1891–1971). Frank Moore Cross (1921–2012) further defended and developed Albright’s methodology. Since the days of Albright, evangelical OT scholars have by and large adopted the methodological principles of CAM. Its fundamental structures and presuppositions now dominate most hermeneutical approaches to the Old Testament in evangelical scholarship.³

PROBLEMS WITH CAM

In a devastating critique of comparative archaeological method, Don Collett has incisively demonstrated how CAM provides practically no hermeneutical boundaries or methodological criteria for understanding the relationship between external data and the text of Scripture. The method has opened the door for a hermeneutical Wild West in evangelical OT scholarship. Collett observes that Albright’s comparative archaeological method⁴ “stressed the Old Testament’s *situatedness* in its ancient Near East context as that which is either 1) *decisive* for its meaning or 2) in a relationship of *equal ultimacy* with the OT’s own literary and canonical context.”⁵ In other words, CAM immediately reduces divine revelation to an authoritative status equal to, or in most cases, *subordinate to* modern scholarly interpretations of ANE archaeological and historical evidence. As such, CAM immediately and directly conflicts with Scripture’s explicit claims and self-witness.

One obvious problem with CAM is that archaeologists and historians regularly massage or even radically modify their dates and conclusions. Since new archaeological data is being uncovered in the ANE each year, archaeologists continually jettison old theories and paradigms for new ones. Mainstream ideas from one or two generations ago are now considered antiquated.

Part of Albright’s motivation in developing CAM was to treat the Bible as a “neutral” object of scientific study in an effort to divorce his methodology from Christian confessional commitments.⁶ This reduction of the Bible to the category of “just another ancient book” is another crucial methodological assumption embedded in CAM, one *which the Bible itself also explicitly contradicts* (Dt 4:8; Pss 19:7, 119:1–176, 147:19–20; 2 Tm 3:16; Rom 3:2; 2 Pt 1:19, 1:21; 1 Jn 5:9; 1 Thes 2:13; Lk 16:29, 16:31, 24:27, 24:44; Eph 2:20; Rv 22:18–19).⁷ The Bible is *not* just another ancient book. On this point, E. J. Young’s observation is worth noting:

There are those who apparently think that it is possible to approach the Bible with a neutral attitude. Their position seems to be, ‘Let us study Scripture as we would any other book. Let us subject it to the same tests as we do other writings. If it proves to be the Word of God, well and good, but, if not, let us accept the fact.’...The so-called neutral attitude towards the Bible is in reality not neutral at all, for it begins by rejecting the lofty claims of divinity which the Bible makes and it assumes that the human mind *of itself* can act as judge of divine revelation.⁸

Moreover, CAM carries with it another faulty and unstated assumption: biblical and ANE scholars who do not hold to confessional commitments operate with methodological and philosophical/religious neutrality. That is, CAM inherently assumes that *a priori* philosophical and worldview commitments have little to no influence on a secular scholar's assessment of the Bible and related ANE evidence. The type of warning expressed by Long is largely overlooked:

As for material evidence, we must bear in mind...that archaeological remains are neither self-interpreting nor more objective than other kinds of evidence. The minute we begin to talk about material evidence, we are interpreting it. So we dare not forget what we ourselves, or the archaeologists we read, bring to the task of assessment.⁹

Even worse, CAM ignores the menacing impact that unbelief and sinfulness have on human interpretations of archaeological and historical evidence intersecting with the Bible. No person is neutral in his/her treatment of the Creator's holy speech. Fallen, unregenerate scholars possess a deep-seated antipathy toward the God who speaks in Scripture. While this antipathy is not usually discernible to men, it is to the omnipresent and infinite God revealed in Scripture. The apostle Paul's inspired and infallible presentation of man's condition in Romans makes this truth unmistakably clear.¹⁰ CAM inherently and necessarily ignores this anthropological reality. The deployment of secular paradigms that directly deny the historicity of biblical texts affirms man's posture toward God. This denial is particularly true with the book of Genesis.¹¹ By applying CAM and its methodological presuppositions to the Bible, evangelical scholars are, in effect, ignoring a divinely revealed and central feature of human nature.

Collett further observes that evangelicals who employ CAM often appear to be suffering from a "methodological schizophrenia." That is, via CAM they subordinate the meaning and authority of the Bible to human interpretations of the external milieu from which it originated, while simultaneously and paradoxically "restricting its function as inspired Scripture to the realm of the church or private faith."¹² Biblical authority in church on Sunday, man-centered authority in the academy on Monday. When one challenges retreats into the private sphere, objections are often accompanied with retorts such as "I love Jesus just as much as you do," or "I believe in the authority and inerrancy of the Bible too," or "but that's just your interpretation!"¹³ These proclamations are usually vaguely defined, especially with respect to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. In recent decades, this personal arbitrariness has become embedded even more deeply in CAM due to the pervasive influence of postmodernism.

In this multi-part article, I will argue that CAM has largely been an abysmal failure for evangelicalism and is in desperate need of a complete overhaul. Hermeneutics governed by the comparative archaeological method paradoxically sabotage evangelical efforts to demonstrate the reliability of the Scriptures. I will make several critical points along these lines:

1. I will outline and critique the key tenets of CAM by using the example of the Ai narrative in Joshua 7–8 and the dating of the Exodus/Conquest more broadly. This process will shed light on how man-centered hermeneutical methods open the doors to an endless array of interpretative conclusions. Since CAM offers virtually no methodological control over biblical interpretation, a hermeneutical Wild West reigns across the landscape of evangelicalism. This is especially true when dealing with Genesis 1–11, and with the patriarchal lifespans in particular.
2. I will illustrate how CAM inherently usurps the supremacy of the Holy Spirit in the interpretive process. Simultaneously, CAM also implicitly denies three vital attributes of Scripture: clarity, sufficiency, and authority.
3. I will document how CAM is directly at odds with Jesus's declarations about Scripture and the attitude that He consistently expresses toward the written Word of God. Jesus severely rebuked those who elevated man-made traditions to the level of Scripture.
4. I will briefly demonstrate how a careful exegesis of Genesis 5/11, other related texts, and the lifespans and begetting ages associated with the patriarchs in Genesis/Exodus reduce nonliteral interpretations of those numbers to exegetical, canonical, and historical incoherence.
5. I will apply a canonical hermeneutic (defined below) to the patriarchal lifespans by providing a brief sketch from systematic and biblical theology to explain why God intended the numbers to be interpreted as actual ages.

JOSHUA'S AI AS A TEST CASE

Divine revelation is not buried in past historical events which depend on recovery by archaeology in order to be made available to the church.¹⁴ —Brevard S. Childs

To illustrate CAM's intractable problems, let us sketch out an example well known to regular readers of *Bible and Spade*: the city of Ai described in Joshua 7–8. Albright argued that et-Tell, located about ten miles north of Jerusalem, in the hill country of Benjamin, was Joshua's Ai. Well aware that the known archaeological evidence from et-Tell did not seem to correlate with the date of Joshua's Conquest derived from the OT (ca. 1406 BC), Albright set out to resolve the conflict. Instead of looking for an alternative site, waiting for additional archaeological evidence to emerge, and/or more closely reevaluating the known data, Albright "reinterpreted" the text of Scripture.¹⁵

1 Kings 6:1 indicates there were precisely 479 years from the Exodus to the start of the building of the Temple, which began in the second month of the fourth year of Solomon's reign. Since multiple independent lines of evidence firmly establish the Temple inauguration year of 967 BC,¹⁶ the date of the Exodus calculates to 1446 BC, with the Conquest of Canaan beginning 40 years later in 1406 BC. But according to Albright, the precise Hebrew phrase "in the 80th year and 400th year" (written in ordinal form) no longer means what it clearly and unambiguously says. No, instead the phrase really means twelve "idealized" generations of forty years each ($12 \times 40 = 480$).¹⁷ These 12 idealized generations must

CAM ignores the menacing impact that unbelief and sinfulness have on human interpretations of archaeological and historical evidence intersecting with the Bible. No person is neutral in his/her treatment of the Creator's holy speech.

then be multiplied by 25 years, the length of an actual generation, resulting in a genuine time span of about 300 years. Albright contorted the sacred text with an interpretive maneuver that has no exegetical or canonical basis.¹⁸

The inclusively reckoned time frame of 479 actual years¹⁹ is an intractable exegetical reality that alone destroys the idealized-generation interpretation.²⁰ Moreover, according to 1 Chronicles 6:33–37, there were 19 generations from the Exodus to Solomon,²¹ not 12.²² No matter. This newly invented idealized interpretation allowed Albright to redate the Conquest to the 13th century BC, purportedly correlating Joshua's entrance into Canaan with the prevailing archaeological consensus. While liberal-critical scholarship has completely rejected a historical Exodus/Conquest, several prominent evangelical archaeologists have adopted Albright's dubious (re)dating maneuver.²³

...I would encourage ordinary Christians to be suspicious of "experts" in some field who attempt to lead you away from what seems to be the plain meaning of the text of scripture.⁶⁸ —Wayne Grudem

In the 1960s, Joseph Callaway of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary excavated et-Tell, which he also believed was Ai. Based on his interpretations of the archaeological evidence discovered there, he concluded, "Ai is simply an embarrassment to every view of the conquest that takes the biblical and archaeological evidence seriously."²⁴ He claimed that "there is no evidence of Late Bronze occupation at et-Tell."²⁵ Callaway rejected Albright's attempt to date the Conquest to the 13th century BC. Instead of twisting 1 Kings 6:1, the practical effect of Callaway's dating was simply to jettison the chronological referent as irrelevant. He viewed the Conquest described in Joshua as exaggerated and situated a smaller-scale Israelite invasion in the 12th century BC.²⁶

In 1969, David Livingston founded ABR to critically investigate the claims made by Albright, Callaway, and others. As a lifelong Christian, David understood that God's Word was an authoritative, inerrant, and infallible witness to both the events it records and to the dates in which it places them. He rejected Albright's and Callaway's contortions of the biblical text and the exegetical gymnastics advanced by evangelical proponents of a 13th-century BC Exodus/Conquest. Livingston refused to subordinate God's revelation to archaeological interpretations. Later, Bryant Wood (1995–2013) and Scott Stripling (2014–2016) would follow Livingston's adherence to the biblical text and its authoritative priority. Both led excavations at Khirbet el-Maqatir and identified it as Ai based on the biblical, geographical, historical, and archaeological evidence.²⁷ If this identification is accurate, it supports the historicity and chronology of the relevant biblical texts.

In this Ai illustration, I have presented three ways in which scholars have deployed CAM:

1. The biblical text was exegetically distorted to accommodate majority interpretations of "known" archaeological evidence. The true meaning of God's speech was hermeneutically grounded in an external authority structure and made ultimately dependent on it. As a result, the locus of authority and meaning came to reside in the fallen mind of the ANE scholar (Albright).

2. The historicity of the biblical text was diminished and/or partially rejected. Scholarly interpretations of the archaeological evidence were deemed more authoritative and accurate than the sacred text, hermeneutically grounding divine revelation in an external authority structure. As a result, the locus of authority and meaning came to reside in the fallen mind of the ANE scholar (Callaway).
3. The archaeological and historical evidence was examined more closely. Both the external data and Scripture itself had been misinterpreted. The identification and excavation of an alternative site provided evidence that affirmed the accuracy of the narrative in Joshua 7–8. The biblical text established and controlled the parameters for scholarly inquiry, with the archaeological and historical evidence serving in a ministerial relationship to God's Word. The locus of authority remained in the sacred, divinely inspired text—that is, with God and His speech. Hermeneutical method remained grounded in divine revelation (applied by Wood/Stripling).

Three additional examples will further illustrate my point. Gary Rendsburg dates the Exodus/Conquest to the same period as Callaway, the 12th century BC. Rendsburg does not follow Callaway's hermeneutic, but his own. His reinterpretation of, "in the 480th year," in 1 Kings 6:1 depends on his understanding of purportedly related ANE texts that employ numerical rounding. Rendsburg buttresses his argument by also reinterpreting the genealogical list in 1 Chronicles 6:33–37. He does so by appealing to a study of genealogical telescoping in modern-day tribes in Africa.²⁸ Here, we observe how CAM provides no methodological provision for saying: "No, you've gone too far in your use of external data. You cannot appeal to modern-day African tribal practices." If these practices help Rendsburg to make his case, why shouldn't he use them?²⁹ If Eskimos of the Arctic utilized a particular method to memorize their genealogies, CAM contains no mechanism to prevent an evangelical scholar from applying it to the genealogies of Genesis 5/11, 1 Chronicles, or even Matthew 1:1–17 and Luke 3:23–38.

Larry Bruce offers another dating hermeneutic. He also argues that the Exodus should be placed in the 12th century BC, but he does not deploy Rendsburg's ANE/African tribe hermeneutic, nor does he follow Callaway's method. Bruce offers an alternative interpretation of the Merneptah Stela, the famous Egyptian inscription that mentions Israel in ca. 1210 BC. Instead of providing a careful exegesis of 1 Kings 6:1 and Judges 11:26 to justify a 12th-century date, Bruce quickly glosses over them. Since CAM provides no methodological rationale for rejecting this "Merneptah Stela" hermeneutic, virtually ignoring the import of directly pertinent biblical texts remains a valid hermeneutical option.³⁰

Still another dating hermeneutic is deployed by archaeologist Steven Collins. He dates the Exodus to ca. 1406 BC and the Conquest to 1366 BC, 40 years later than the correct dates. To justify these dates, Collins follows the Septuagint's reading for 1 Kings 6:1—"in the 440th year"—instead of "in the 480th year," as recorded in the Hebrew Masoretic Text. It should be noted that an up-to-date LXX critical edition of 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings (known as 4 Kingdoms) has not yet been collated and published, so it is not possible at this point to supplant the originality of the MT's reading. In fact, the LXX's reading almost surely originated as a gloss, which would make Collins's dating of the Exodus/Conquest precariously dependent on a scribal error.³¹

But no matter. Collins ultimately hermeneutically grounds the true meaning of the sacred text in his interpretation and understanding of the archaeological evidence. In this instance, his larger objective is to synchronize the date of the Exodus with the reign of Thutmose IV, whom Collins deems to be the best candidate for the pharaoh of the Exodus.³² This type of hermeneutical methodology is even more explicit in Collins's ubiquitous and indefatigable expressions of certainty that the destruction of Sodom in Genesis 18–19 can (no, *must*) only be equated with a Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1650–1700 BC) conflagration unearthed in the excavations at Tall el-Hammam in Jordan. Thus, we ought to reject patriarchal chronology, and the numbers associated with the patriarchs in Genesis are therefore not to be interpreted as actual ages. Instead, the true meaning of the numbers is either honorific, symbolic, or even unknown to us. The true meaning of the sacred biblical text is hermeneutically grounded in interpretations of archaeological evidence from Hammam and other sites in the ANE. We will return to the subject of the patriarchal lifespans in part two, but for now, we simply observe here that Collins's hermeneutical method prioritizes interpretations of archaeological evidence over the biblical text.³³ The locus of authority has been shifted away from God's speech and into the mind of modern scholarship.

One can plainly see that, instead of yielding clear results, CAM produces widely disparate interpretive conclusions. Many more could be added to this short list. Whether we apply the hermeneutical method(s) of Albright, Callaway, Rendsburg, Bruce, or Collins, the end result is still the same: “the center of authority passes from the text of Scripture to the interpreter.”³⁴ Thus, according to each one of these hermeneutical approaches, after Yahweh inspired the author of 1 Kings 6:1 to write “in the 80th and 400th year,” the *real* meaning of the phrase remained hidden away for nearly three millennia in the *yet-to-be-revealed* methodologies of 21st-century ANE scholars. Thus, the “gnostic elitism inherent in the biblical archaeology movement inaugurated by Albright”³⁵ grants ultimate interpretive authority to a small circle of scholarly elites.

THE SOLUTION

From these examples alone, we observe how CAM leaves evangelical scholars with a wide-open door to adopt almost any interpretation of the biblical text they wish. Without the “sheriff” of Scripture to provide the boundaries and rules for interpretation, the landscape of conservative OT scholarship has become a lawless Wild West governed by a seemingly endless smorgasbord of personal hermeneutical preferences.

I suggest that the only way out of this hopeless mess is to adopt a canonical hermeneutic, defined by Collett as follows:

...a canonical hermeneutic recognizes that while Scripture's extra-biblical context contributes to its meaning, it does not do so in independence from Scripture's theological claims and self-witness, but in obedient dialogue and conversation with that witness. Moreover, in the ‘dialogue’ between Scripture and its external milieu, there is a *hierarchy of contextual authority* that obtains when it comes to the determination of biblical meaning. ***Biblical context is master, and the Bible's external historical context is servant.***³⁶

Returning for a moment to the approach taken historically by the ABR ministry, we see that Livingston, Wood, and Stripling

resisted the temptation to “subordinat[e] the Bible's form and subject matter to its external environment.”³⁷ However, this was not *because* of CAM itself. No, they did so *in spite of* the method, which “makes no provision for prioritizing theological categories such as ‘inspiration’ and ‘canon’ when it comes to gaining access to the meaning of biblical texts, or for that matter, justifying their truth claims.”³⁸ They employed the canonical hermeneutical method without fully expositing it. This method does not depend upon human opinion or scholarly theories about the nature of external archaeological evidence. A canonical hermeneutic keeps the locus of authority where it belongs: with God and His infallible, inerrant, inscripturated speech.

CAM NEGATES ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES OF SCRIPTURE

Any hermeneutical method that places the locus of Scripture's meaning and interpretation in the mind of sinful, fallen man negates Scripture's essential and self-attesting attributes: clarity, sufficiency, and authority. All three of these attributes are closely interrelated. Here, I will discuss clarity and sufficiency. Many of the arguments for scriptural clarity apply directly to the doctrine of sufficiency. I will cover scriptural authority in part two.

God does not disclose himself in esoterica that human beings cannot understand apart from some mediating interpreter.³⁹
—D. A. Carson

...the Scriptures are essentially clear in their meaning and do not need an authoritative human voice to speak for them as if they were intrinsically obscure.⁴⁰ —J. I. Packer

Today, obscurity reigns. The mantra of the postmodern age is that hermeneutical and interpretive certainty is not possible. This dogma has flooded its way into evangelical scholarship and has been widely adopted as a newfound piety.⁴¹ “But that's just YOUR interpretation!” is the bleating battle cry that virtually demands that any interpretation of the sacred text be treated with equal validity as long as its proponent professes to be an evangelical. And on the other side of the same postmodern coin lies the “art of imperious ignorance.” Michael Ovey describes this growing phenomenon:

The Bible is unclear, it is said, and so we must be content not to know. We must be ignorant....

The claim to be ignorant on the grounds that something is unclear is actually quite ambitious. More than that, it can be an imperious claim that exercises power over others without, at times, the inconvenience of reasoned argument. No wonder it is so popular.⁴²

So, either the Bible remains perpetually unclear, or we need ANE scholars to apply their understanding of external evidence to it, and then they will inform us as to its true meaning. In either case, the widely misunderstood but essential doctrine of scriptural clarity (or perspicuity) has become a casualty of these hermeneutical approaches. Although the doctrine was more fully developed during and after the Reformation, its basic expression can be found earlier, in the writings of Augustine and others.⁴³ Its most ardent defender was Martin Luther, who famously contended with Erasmus over the subject.⁴⁴

Modern discussions on scriptural sufficiency tend to revolve around the contentious question of whether God continues to speak to His people in the same manner with which He spoke to the prophets and apostles before the canon of Scripture was closed.⁴⁵ Here, our focus is on the question of whether modern scholars must add their interpretations of scientific and ANE archaeological/historical evidence to the Bible before it can be interpreted correctly and understood as God intended. In other words, is Scripture “sufficient” on its own as it pertains to our ability to interpret it correctly? Or must a human authority outside of Scripture add information to Scripture in order for Scripture to *then* become understandable to the Church? In other words, what hermeneutic generated by the mind of sinful man must be employed in order to correctly understand God’s divine speech deposited in Scripture?

The doctrine of scriptural sufficiency is closely interrelated with the doctrine of clarity. If Scripture is inherently clear, then any biblical text carefully interpreted within its canonical context can be properly understood on its own terms. If nothing needs to be added to Scripture to make it clear, it logically follows that nothing needs to be added to Scripture to make it sufficient. More precisely, if Scripture is inherently clear, it is also inherently self-sufficient.

Here, I will outline a few critical points about both clarity and sufficiency. Clarity is defined by Thompson as follows:

The clarity of Scripture is that quality of Scripture which, arising from the fact that it [Scripture] is ultimately God’s effective communicative act, ensures the meaning of each biblical text, when viewed in the context of the canonical whole, is accessible to all who come to it in faith and dependent upon the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶

1. Clarity must be properly related to God Himself. Throughout his book *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture*, Thompson extensively argues that clarity is necessarily intrinsic to the biblical text because it is inherently and inextricably bound to the character and the explicitly stated purposes of the triune God.⁴⁷ God uses words to make Himself known.⁴⁸ He spoke the cosmos into existence, and every word God utters possesses “unfettered efficacy.”⁴⁹ Scripture’s clarity is a theological necessity because God is the One who is speaking, and the triune God does not and cannot mumble.⁵⁰ Human frailties that prevent clear communication through the use of language do not extend to God.⁵¹ All of the words of Scripture, including 1 Kings 6:1, the Ai narrative, or the patriarchal lifespans in Genesis, are “breathed out by God” (2 Tm 3:16). God’s unambiguous speech, written down by the inspired author who was chosen and designated by God Himself, does not require scholarly mediators with secret hermeneutical keys from the world of archaeology or science so that sacred Scripture might be interpreted correctly.

2. Human languages or translations do not negate scriptural clarity.

On almost all sides in contemporary discussion language is dealt with as if it were a purely human phenomenon. No attitude is more at variance with Scripture, both as a phenomenon and in terms of its teaching. According to the Bible, language is primarily, natively, antecedently divine in character. Speaking is first of all and intrinsically an activity of God.⁵² —Richard B. Gaffin Jr.

Language has existed for eternity within the Godhead. In the created realm, God is the initiator and creator of human language (Gn 1:1–31).⁵³ Moreover, language is a universal phenomenon, given to all people, in all places, and at all times. Man is metaphysically designed to understand language, and this ability includes the capacity to cognitively understand Scripture. Scripture was given to the human authors (Moses, David, Paul, Peter, etc.) by the Holy Spirit and written using the ordinary patterns of language.

Translation of the original Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic Scriptures into native languages is authorized by Scripture itself. It is widely recognized that Jesus spoke in Aramaic, yet at least three of the four Gospels were originally inspired and written in Greek.⁵⁴ Through the human authors, the Holy Spirit “translated” the words of our Lord, establishing the archetypal precedent for Scripture translation and its efficacy. Moreover, the Holy Spirit inspired the NT authors to extensively cite the OT Greek translation (the Septuagint) and not just the original OT languages of Hebrew and Aramaic.⁵⁵ Scripture’s inherent clarity must necessarily be presupposed when the Scriptures are translated into languages around the globe in obedience to Jesus’s explicit command to carry out the Great Commission and teach the nations “to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19–20). Disciples can only be made if they learn the truth of Scripture in their own native language, understand what it means, believe what it says, and apply it to their lives. Some of these new disciples will even be able to learn the original languages of Scripture. Finally, contra language, knowledge of the ANE is not a universal feature of human life and culture. It is a very narrow and limited field of study, and therefore it is *not required* to understand Scripture as God intended.

3. Scripture’s meaning is accessible to all people. Psalm 119:130 reads, “The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple” (cf. Ps. 19:7). The simple person “is not merely one who lacks intellectual ability, but one who lacks sound judgment, who is prone to making mistakes, and who is easily led astray.”⁵⁶ Despite these human frailties and limitations, Scripture remains clear, a light even to the simple. Moses instructs the Israelites to publicly read God’s Law to all the people (Dt 31:9–13). The OT prophets speak to all the people of God (Is 1:10, 5:3, 9:1, 40:1–8; Jer 2:4, 4:1, 10:1; Ez 3:1). Jesus Himself addresses ordinary people with divine speech (Mt 5:1, 13:1–2), as do the apostles (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:2; Eph 1:1; Jas 1:1; 1 Pt 1:1). Even children can understand Scripture (Dt 6:7; Ps 78:5–8; Eph 6:1–4; Col 3:20). Timothy knew the Scriptures from his childhood (2 Tm 3:15). In no instance does Scripture indicate that a mediating human interpreter possessing specialized external knowledge is required for accurate biblical interpretation.

4. God’s instructions and commands to obey what is written in Scripture presuppose the doctrine of clarity. Deuteronomy 29:29 indicates that there are “secret things” that God keeps to Himself, but that whatever He reveals is understandable and accessible to both present hearers and future generations (cf. Dt 4:1–2; Ps 19:7–11; Rom 4:22–25, 15:4; 1 Cor 10:1–11; 1 Tm 4:13; 2 Tm 3:14–17). The covenant unveiled in the next chapter of Deuteronomy (30:11–14) asserts Scripture’s intrinsic clarity.⁵⁷ The apostle Paul draws on the OT to instruct the Church in the present day, writing, “Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction” (Rom 15:4). Paul’s point, also inspired by the Holy Spirit, would be incoherent if the clarity of OT Scripture were not presupposed.

5. The doctrine of clarity is not limited to salvific texts or major theological truths. In his exposition on clarity, Francis Turretin primarily emphasizes the Scriptures that speak directly to issues of redemption,⁵⁸ but he does not end the discussion there. He rightly maintains that clarity is an attribute that extends to *all* of Scripture:

...it pleased God to present everywhere and make easy of comprehension all necessary things [concerning salvation]; but those less necessary [concerning salvation] are so closely concealed as to require great exertion to extricate them. Thus, besides bread and sustenance, she [Scripture] has her luxuries, gems and gold deep under the surface and obtainable only by indefatigable labor; and as heaven is sprinkled with greater and lesser stars, so the Scriptures are not everywhere equally resplendent [radiant], but are distinguished by clearer and obscurer places, as by stars of a greater or lesser magnitude.⁵⁹

The “gems and gold” in Scripture of which Turretin speaks require sincere seekers to dig away at the barriers preventing us from apprehending them. Once we clear away the debris, the beauty of Scripture’s treasures become visible to us (Prv 2:3–5). The Bereans were lauded for their careful examination of the Scriptures after hearing Paul’s presentation of the gospel (Acts 17:11). That they were able to reach a proper understanding of the OT revelation presupposes that the Scriptures are inherently understandable.

Similarly, Wayne Grudem uses the metaphor of a journey to a distant mountain.⁶⁰ We can see the mountain from afar, but it is obscured by our own eyesight limitations, cloudy weather, and so on. However, as we journey closer to the mountain, we can see it in much greater detail. The mountain’s inherent clarity never changed. How much more so with all of Scripture.

6. Scripture is light. “Holy Scripture is clear because God is light and therefore the one in whose light we see light” (Pss 19:7, 119:105, 119:130; Prv 6:23).⁶¹ 2 Peter 1:19 indicates that Scripture is a lamp shining in a dark place. Turretin’s light metaphor above is most instructive here: stars emit varying degrees of light. The Scriptures that emit light of a lesser magnitude require that genuine seekers of truth guided by the Holy Spirit draw themselves closer to them. However—and this is most important—all stars emit light. Therefore, all Scripture emits light. No passage of Scripture is inherently “dark” (i.e., unclear).

7. All Scripture is inherently clear even though some verses are more difficult to understand than others. Scripture itself allows for this obvious fact. Turretin’s starlight metaphor speaks to this reality. Referring to Paul’s letters, Peter writes, “There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures” (2 Pt 3:16b). The distortions of the false teachers extend beyond Paul’s letters to “the other Scriptures” (i.e., the Old Testament). Notice Peter does *not* say some of Paul’s words are *impossible* to understand. Since he refers to some of the content of Paul’s letters as difficult, we can

logically infer that much of what Paul has written is *not* difficult to understand. False teachers are condemned, in part, for deliberately twisting the sacred text of Scripture. The possibility of arriving at an accurate interpretation is a logical basis for their eternal condemnation. The true meaning of the text was genuinely available to them.⁶²

Difficult passages of Scripture do not require the “light” of ANE scholars in order to be understood correctly. This is not to say that archaeological evidence cannot *assist* us in our understanding of Scripture. But we dare not say that archaeological evidence is the *key* to our understanding Scripture. Instead, the key to understanding more difficult Scripture is Scripture itself: “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly” (WCF 1:9).⁶³

8. Clarity does not negate the need for the teaching office of the Church. The doctrine of clarity does not require that all of Scripture is *immediately* clear to the human reader. God raises up teachers/pastors within the context of the Church to teach the Scriptures to the people of God (1 Tm 3:2; 2 Tm 2:24; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11; Rom 12:7; 1 Pt 4:11). “Rightly handling the word of truth” is their sacred task (2 Tm 2:15). However, the church teacher does not possess special, elite knowledge that serves as

a hermeneutical key for unlocking Scripture’s true meaning. Instead, he serves as a faithful guide and expositors to his hearers what God has already clearly revealed in Scripture.⁶⁴ The teaching office of the Church was ordained and established by God at the Church’s foundation and has its precedent in the OT. Conversely, the “office” of the ANE scholar/archaeologist came along very late in the game, many centuries after the Church was initially birthed.

Difficult passages of Scripture do not require the “light” of ANE scholars in order to be understood correctly.

Because of the blinding effects of sin, the Holy Spirit must open the heart and mind of a person to truly understand, truly believe, and truly apply Scripture.

9. The Holy Spirit is the only divinely authorized Mediator necessary for accurate biblical interpretation, belief, and application. Unbelievers can formally understand the language and words in Scripture, but only the person who has received the Holy Spirit by faith in Christ can reach a proper understanding that involves believing what Scripture says and commands and applying its truth claims to one’s life.⁶⁵ Because of the blinding effects of sin, the Holy Spirit must open the heart and mind of a person to truly understand, truly believe, and truly apply Scripture (Pss 19:7–11, 119:18, 119:27, 119:34, 119:73; Lk 24:44–45; Jn 14:26; 1 Cor 2:12, 2:14; 2 Cor 3:14–16, 4:3–4).⁶⁶ Another authorized mediator, such as the ANE scholar, is unnecessary. Thompson concludes:

[The apostle Paul] spoke at some length of the role of the Spirit in enabling “the things freely given us by God” to be understood (1 Cor. 2:6–16). His emphasis is on an impediment to understanding in those who hear or read rather than on some deficiency in what has been given. Paul does not advocate a proto-Gnostic secret knowledge restricted to insiders and not available to others that somehow must be added to Scripture before it is intelligible.⁶⁷

CONCLUSIONS

Conservative evangelicalism has made a colossal error by adopting the methodological assumptions intrinsic to Albright's comparative archaeological method and its subsequent iterations. I have briefly demonstrated how this has played out in the treatment of the Ai narrative in Joshua 7–8 and dating the Exodus and Conquest. In the last several decades, conservative OT scholarship has largely planted its hermeneutical flag in the shifting sands of ANE studies, philosophical naturalism in the guise of objective origins science, and postmodern cultural sensibilities. As a result, OT interpretation floats on an almost endless sea of hermeneutical choices. This problem is grossly magnified in Genesis 1–11, where the collision between worldview paradigms is exceptionally acute.

Several points about CAM bear repeating here. First, specialized knowledge held by a small circle of intellectual elites from academic fields unknown before the 19th century has now become a hermeneutical necessity for accurate biblical interpretation in many evangelical circles. Second, no one else in human history has had access to these secret hermeneutical “keys” that unlock the real meaning of God's speech. The focus of our discussion in part two will be the patriarchal lifespans, and there we will see how evangelical scholars claim that the true and actual meaning of the numbers in Genesis has been beyond the reach of God's people for millennia. No one understood the figures correctly until modern ANE scholars came along to illuminate our minds with their specialized knowledge. Some professing Christians even claim we may never know what God meant when He inspired Moses to record the numbers. Third, God's speech cannot be understood on its own terms. Scripture is therefore inherently unclear and insufficient. Fourth, the sovereign, omnipresent, omnipotent Holy Spirit is inadequate to guide the Church into properly interpreting God's revelation. CAM renders Him insufficient for the task, contra 1 Corinthians 2:6–16. Since God's speech and God's Spirit are judged insufficient and are unable to bring forth clarity, the ANE scholar now sits on the interpretive throne. CAM elevates ANE archaeologists and historians into neo-gnostic, 21st-century sages. In my judgment, this is a disturbing trend in evangelical OT scholarship, and we ought to earnestly pray for its reversal.

GOD IS SPEAKING

Lovers of archaeology may object to the theological thrust of this article. Such a response would miss the entire point of my argument. The handling of God's precious, holy, and infallible Word is a deeply theological and ethical act. For the Christian, it is also an act of worship. The Christian layperson, archaeologist, historian, scholar, or scientist must, first and foremost, be a careful and rigorous *theologian*. Anyone who attempts to relate the Bible to external archaeological data is immediately applying a “theology” to the process, no matter how underdeveloped or informal that theology may be. Attempts at neutrality are illusory and methodologically undermine the uniqueness of Scripture at the outset. No human being is neutral before the face of the triune God and His Word. The moment one begins drawing comparisons between Scripture and external evidence, one is immediately engaged in a theological and ethical act. We must awaken from

our philosophical/theological slumbers and start thinking much more rigorously about the sacred task of hermeneutics and its relationship to archaeological discoveries from the ANE.

Others may bristle at my arguments and conclusions. Let me be absolutely clear: I am criticizing evangelical OT hermeneutical *methods* (2 Cor 10:5). I am not attacking *persons* (Jas 3:9). While I want to avoid *ad hominem* arguments, I am also not persuaded by the charisma, intellectual pedigree, or cultural status of established Christian OT scholars and/or archaeologists who are applying deeply flawed hermeneutical methods to their study of the OT. If these methods are faulty, then they should be demolished, as Scripture demands (2 Cor 10:5). Taken to their logical conclusion, these methods erode and can even destroy faith in the gospel. If one consistently travels along CAM's hermeneutical road, one will inevitably plunge off the cliff of unbelief.

Considering this, let us close part one with the thoughtful and penetrating warning of Martin Luther: “You are to deal with Scripture in such a way that you bear in mind that God Himself says what is written. But since God is speaking, it is not fitting for you wantonly to turn His Word in the direction you wish to go.”

In part two, I will turn my attention to the third attribute of Scripture that CAM usurps and replaces with a man-made structure: authority. I will then turn my attention to the numbers associated with the patriarchs in the Genesis narratives. I will demonstrate that they can only be properly interpreted as actual, real ages. Evangelicals who subscribe to nonliteral interpretations have made a number of exegetical, theological, hermeneutical, and logical blunders. The discussion will include an analysis of selected Hebrew texts, the chronological and literary features of Genesis 5/11, Methuselah's death in the year of the Flood, Noah's age as it is integrated into the Flood narrative, chronological observations in the lives of Abraham and Moses, and the bearing of the New Testament on the question at hand. I will provide a brief theological rationale for the literalness of the patriarchal lifespans. I will also discuss the fact that Jesus Himself unambiguously treated Old Testament Scripture as clear, sufficient, and authoritative. The Son of God repeatedly excoriated any and every attempt to elevate man-made traditions/ideas to the level of Holy Scripture (Mark 7).

Endnotes for this article can be found at www.BibleArchaeology.org. Type “Endnotes” in the search box; next, click the “Bible and Spade Bibliographies and Endnotes” link; then page down to the article.



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NOTES

¹Vern S. Poythress, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *Seeing Christ in All of Scripture: Hermeneutics at Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. Peter A. Lillback (Philadelphia: Westminster Seminary Press, 2016), 10; emphasis added. Also Vern S. Poythress, “God’s Lordship in Interpretation,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 50/1 (1988): 27–64; Vern S. Poythress, *God-Centered Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1999), <https://frame-poythress.org/ebooks/god-centered-biblical-interpretation/>.

²Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 21.

³Don Collett, “Hermeneutics in Context: Comparative Method and Contemporary Evangelical Scholarship,” *Trinity School for Ministry: An Evangelical Seminary in the Anglican Tradition*, October 29, 2010, <http://www.tsm.edu/2010/10/29/hermeneutics-in-context-comparative-method-and-contemporary-evangelical-scholarship/>. I urge readers to carefully study Collett’s incisive article.

⁴Albright built his approach on Herman Gunkel’s liberal-critical methodology (Ibid., 2–10).

⁵Ibid., 6; emphasis added.

⁶This phrase need not be limited to denominations, though such is probably what Albright largely had in mind. It can refer to any professing-Christian commitment to the divine origin of Scripture.

⁷John M. Frame, “Scripture Speaks for Itself,” in *God’s Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Newburgh, IN: Trinity, 1974), 178–200.

⁸Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982): 26–27; emphasis added.

⁹V. Philips Long, “History and Hermeneutics: How Then Should We Read the Bible ‘Historically?’,” in *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation: Six Volumes in One*, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 401.

¹⁰For a discussion of the effect of unbelief on human reason, see Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “Epistemological Reflections on 1 Corinthians 2:6–16,” in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, eds. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 13–40.

¹¹Todd Beall has documented how modern evangelicals have embraced several liberal-critical theories about the OT that were strongly repudiated by conservative scholars just a generation or two ago (“Evangelicalism, Inerrancy, and Current OT Scholarship,” *Bible and Spade* 28/1 [Winter 2015]: 18–24).

¹²Collett, “Hermeneutics in Context,” 17.

¹³For a refreshing rebuttal of this response and similar ones, see D. A. Carson, “But That’s Just Your Interpretation!” *Themelios* 44/3 (2019): 425–32.

¹⁴Brevard S. Childs, “The Old Testament as Scripture of the Church,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43/11 (December 1972): 721. While I am citing Childs here and using the term “canonical hermeneutic,” I am not endorsing his (or anyone else’s) adoption of Karl Barth’s neo-orthodoxy. In the Barthian construct, Scripture “becomes” the Word of God upon human encounter, and is a “witness” to revelation, not revelation itself. Neo-orthodoxy employs a faulty ontology of Scripture, is built on a Kantian theory of knowledge, and allows for limitless historical errors in Scripture’s

propositional content. Thus, while I am using the term “canonical hermeneutic,” which Collett and Childs also employ, I am certainly not endorsing any sort of Barthian neo-orthodoxy or allowing for errors in sacred Scripture. For more, see Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia: P&R Publishing, 1962); David Gibson, “The Answering Speech of Men: Karl Barth on Holy Scripture,” in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 266–91.

¹⁵William F. Albright, “A Revision of Early Hebrew Chronology,” *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 1 (1921): 64, n. 1.

¹⁶Rodger C. Young, “When Did Solomon Die?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46/4 (December 2003): 589–603.

¹⁷Bryant G. Wood, “The Rise and Fall of the 13th-Century Exodus-Conquest Theory,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48/3 (September 2005): 484. Indeed, “[n]owhere in the Bible is it hinted that a ‘full’ or ideal generation was 40 years in length.”

¹⁸For more on Albright and the date of the Exodus and Conquest, see Wood, “Rise and Fall,” 475–89; Bryant G. Wood, “The Biblical Date for the Exodus Is 1446 BC: A Response to James Hoffmeier,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50/2 (June 2007): 249–58; Rodger C. Young, “The Talmud’s Two Jubilees and Their Relevance to the Date of the Exodus,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 68/1 (Spring 2006): 71–83; Douglas Petrovich, “The Dating of Hazor’s Destruction in Joshua 11 by Way of Biblical, Archaeological, and Epigraphical Evidence,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51/3 (September 2008): 489–512; Rodger C. Young and Bryant G. Wood, “A Critical Analysis of the Evidence from Ralph Hawkins for a Late-Date Exodus-Conquest,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51/2 (June 2008): 225–43; Cambria Jones, “Contested Conflagration: Joshua and the Conquest of Hazor,” *Bible and Spade*, 24/3 (Summer 2011): 79–84.

¹⁹Young, “When Did Solomon Die?,” 601–603.

²⁰Watch the ABR staff discuss the date of the Exodus and Conquest in episodes 41 and 42 of *Digging for Truth* TV, available on ABR’s website at www.biblearchaeology.org.

²¹From Heman the musician, who lived in the days of David, back to Korah, who lived in the days of Moses, there were 18 generations. One additional generation takes us to Solomon, or 19 generations.

²²Ironically, when the dubious idealized interpretation is applied to this text, it yields a result of 475 years (19 times 25).

²³Egyptologist James Hoffmeier argues that the meaning of 1 Kings 6:1 is not ultimately determined by a careful exegesis of all relevant sacred texts in canonical context. Instead, its true meaning is to be found in Assyrian or Egyptian practices that employ time spans as “an approximation relating to the distant past” (Scott Stripling et al., *Five Views on the Exodus: Historicity, Chronology, and Theological Implications*, ed. Mark D. Janzen, Counterpoints: Bible & Theology, ed. Stanley N. Gundry [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021], 57–58; see Stripling’s response in the same volume). 1 Kings 6:1 is not “an approximation relating to the distant past.” No, it is specifying with great precision and with inclusive ordinal numbering the length of the time between the Exodus and the start of the Temple’s construction—479 years. The 480th year from the Exodus equates to the 4th year and 2nd month of Solomon’s reign. There is no evidence of an approximation in the text, nor is there evidence that the biblical author knew of such an ANE practice. Hoffmeier’s interpretation renders 1 Kings 6:1

incoherent: “In an approximate date related to the distant past after the people of Israel came out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the second month, which is the month of Ziv, he began to build the house of the Lord.” “In the 80th and 400th year” cannot be read as 300 years or some other time approximation. Moreover, 1 and 2 Kings are replete with precise chronological markers, which serve as internal indicators that 1 Kings 6:1 is to be understood in the same manner. Hoffmeier does not apply the same hermeneutical rationale to Exodus 12:40, which he treats as a genuine span of time. To undercut the force of 1 Kings 6:1, Hoffmeier also argues that 15th-century BC advocates should read the Judges era as chronologically consecutive, which would push the Exodus back into the 16th century BC. But if so, how can the Exodus be in the 13th century? To get a 13th-century Exodus, the Judges era must be collapsed to a length it cannot bear. Moreover, no mention is made of the scholarship making the careful exegetical case for overlapping reigns in Judges that result in correlation between the length of the Judges era and the 479 years of 1 Kings 6:1 (see David L. Washburn, “The Chronology of Judges: Another Look,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147/588 (October–December 1990): 414–25; Andrew Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 87–109; Sean M. Warner, “The Dating of the Period of the Judges,” *Vetus Testamentum* 28/4 (October 1978): 455–63). Beyond resulting in incoherent exegesis, these interpretive gymnastics hermeneutically ground divine revelation in an outside authority structure. The Church could not and did not know the true meaning of 1 Kings 6:1 until ANE scholars came along to enlighten us. Like Scott Stripling, I highly commend Dr. Hoffmeier for his arguments for a historical Exodus and his grasp of the archaeological and literary evidence. In this regard, he is brilliant. And he is well respected here at ABR. But his hermeneutical method is fatally flawed and should be rejected by anyone who holds to the primacy of divine revelation. Other evangelical 13th-century advocates include Steven Ortiz, Ralph Hawkins, and Kenneth Kitchen. They employ similarly flawed hermeneutical and exegetical methods.

²⁴ Joseph A. Callaway, “New Evidence on the Conquest of Ai,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87/3 (September 1968): 312.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 314.

²⁶ “I believe there is a viable option to Albright’s view, namely, that Josh 8 1–29 reflects a conquest of Ai in Iron Age I, or in the twelfth century B.C.” (*Ibid.*, 316). Callaway also asserted that the Israelite Conquest was “less glorious than the enterprise the traditioners have made it,” and that Canaan was infiltrated by other people groups around the same time (320).

²⁷ Scott Stripling and Mark Hassler, “The ‘Problem’ of Ai Solved after Nearly Forty Years of Excavation in the West Bank of Israel,” *Bible and Spade* 31/2 (Spring 2018): 40–44; Bryant G. Wood, “The Search for Joshua’s Ai,” in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, eds. Richard S. Hess, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Paul J. Ray Jr., *Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement* 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 205; Peter Briggs, “Testing the Factuality of the Conquest of Ai Narrative in the Book of Joshua” in *Beyond the Jordan: Studies in Honor of W. Harold Mare*, ed. Glenn A. Carnagey, Sr. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 157–96.

²⁸ 1 Chronicles 6:33–37 only supports a 15th-century BC Exodus/Conquest. Rendsburg’s arguments appear in Scott Stripling et al., *Five Views on the Exodus*.

²⁹ Stripling makes this same basic point in *Ibid.*, 210–15.

³⁰ For more, see Jonathan J. Routley, “Does the Merneptah Stela Allow for a 12th Century Exodus?” *Bible and Spade* 33/1 (Winter 2020): 4–8.

³¹ A scribal gloss most likely occurred in the Hebrew *Vorlage* prior to the Greek translation. “In the fourth year” (בשנה הרביעית) appears in the same verse. “Fourth” could easily have been substituted for 80th (בשמונים שנה) because of mental and visual error. This is the best explanation for the LXX’s faulty reading. Alternatively, at the Greek level, “40th” (τεσσαρακοστῷ) in the LXX could be the result of parablepsis. The original of “8” in “80th” (ὀκτακοστῷ) could have been replaced by the “4” in “40th” (τεσσαρακοστῷ), the “4” being found in the next verse (6:2) of the LXX in “τεσσαράκοντα πήχεων” (forty cubits). The 40-year difference might also be the result of an exegetical/interpretive decision made by the original translator or an early transcriber of LXX 1 Kings. In any case, there is not enough evidence presently available to demonstrate that the LXX reading is superior to the MT’s.

³² Steve Collins, *Let My People Go! Using Historical Synchronisms to Identify the Pharaoh of the Exodus* (Albuquerque, NM: Trinity Southwest University Press, 2012).

³³ A clear and concise sketch of Collins’s method can be found in Michael A. Grisanti, *Recent Developments in Patriarchal Chronology: Key Issues and Overview of the Big Picture* (paper, 71st Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Diego, CA, November 2019).

³⁴ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “Contemporary Hermeneutics and the Study of the New Testament,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 31/2 (May 1969): 133.

³⁵ Collett, “Hermeneutics in Context,” 15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5; emphases added.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁹ D. A. Carson, “Is the Doctrine of *Claritas Scripturae* Still Relevant Today?,” in *Collected Writings on Scripture*, comp. Andrew David Naselli (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 179.

⁴⁰ J. I. Packer, “Sola Scriptura’ in History and Today,” in Montgomery, *God’s Inerrant Word*, 49.

⁴¹ Refreshing remedies for this troubling trend within the Church can be found in D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 21 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 30–45; Moisés Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible? The History of Interpretation in the Light of Current Issues*, in Silva, *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation*, 17–90; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*; David B. Garner, “Did God Really Say?,” in *Did God Really Say? Affirming the Truthfulness and Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. David B. Garner (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 129–61.

⁴² Michael J. Ovey, “The Art of Imperious Ignorance,” *Themelios* 41/1 (2016): 5–7.

⁴³ Thompson, *Clear and Present Word*, 110, 137; Carson, “*Claritas Scripturae*,” 180–86; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics 1: Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, from Dutch (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 478, 489.

⁴⁴ Martin Luther, “The Bondage of the Will,” in *Thy Word Is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today*, eds. Peter A. Lillback and Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 3–9; Thompson, *Clear and Present Word*, 143–150. See also William Whitaker,

A Disputation on Holy Scripture: Against the Papists, Especially Bellarmine and Stapleton, ed. and trans. William Fitzgerald, from Latin (Cambridge, 1588; Cambridge, 1849), 359–401 (citations refer to the 1849 edition); Matthias Flacius, *How to Understand the Sacred Scriptures: From Clavis Scripturae Sacrae*, trans. Wade R. Johnston, from Latin (Saginaw, MI: Magdeburg, 2011); Wayne Grudem, “The Perspicuity of Scripture,” *Themelios* 34/3 (2009): 288–308; John S. Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 621–79.

⁴⁵ Jeremiah Johnson, ed., *One Foundation: Essays on the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Valencia, CA: Grace to You, 2019).

⁴⁶ Mark D. Thompson, “The Generous Gift of a Gracious Father: Toward a Theological Account of the Clarity of Scripture,” in Carson, *Enduring Authority*, 618.

⁴⁷ Thompson, “Generous Gift,” 615–43.

⁴⁸ Thompson, *Clear and Present Word*, 68–69.

⁴⁹ Garner, “Did God Really Say?” 146.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 148–59.

⁵¹ “To affirm the clarity of Scripture in this way need not compromise the genuine humanity of the biblical texts, since neither obscurity nor error is a necessary corollary of genuine humanity, even in a fallen world” (Thompson, “Generous Gift,” 618). Also Thompson, *Clear and Present Word*, 69; John M. Frame, “God and Biblical Language: Transcendence and Immanence,” in Montgomery, *God’s Inerrant Word*, 159–77.

⁵² “Contemporary Hermeneutics,” 139.

⁵³ Vern S. Poythress, “God and Language,” in Garner, *Affirming the Truthfulness*, 93–106.

⁵⁴ I am allowing here for the possibility that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew, as claimed by Irenaeus. It is beyond our purpose here to explore this issue.

⁵⁵ For an overview and supporting academic sources, see Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 200–27; R. Timothy McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁵⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 106; Kristian Brackets, “The Perspicuity of the Scriptures: Presupposition, Principle or Phantasm,” *KAIROS: Evangelical Journal of Theology* 4/1 (2010): 42–43.

⁵⁷ Carson, “*Claritas Scripturae*,” 180.

⁵⁸ The Westminster Confession of Faith 1:7 “presents biblical perspicuity in terms of its lucid central redemptive core and its resultant accessibility to its readers” (Garner, “Did God Really Say?” 144). While the explicit emphasis of WCF 1:7 is on salvation, a closer look at the broader context of chapter one presupposes that the doctrine of clarity extends to all of Scripture.

⁵⁹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, from Latin, vol. 1: *First Through Tenth Topics* (Geneva: Tournes, 1679; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), 144. Citations refer to the P&R edition.

⁶⁰ “The Perspicuity of Scripture,” 294.

⁶¹ John Webster, “On the Clarity of Holy Scripture,” in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 40.

⁶² True knowledge of the text’s meaning does not necessitate having exhaustive knowledge of its meaning (Carson, “*Claritas Scripturae*,” 191).

⁶³ Westminster Divines, “The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647),” *Ligonier Ministries: The Teaching Fellowship of R.C. Sproul*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-confession-faith/> (May 12, 2021).

⁶⁴ As Grudem notes, teaching in the Church can also be “informal.” This includes parents and others who are mature in the faith. In no case does the teacher possess secret knowledge that is otherwise inaccessible to the layperson (“The Perspicuity of Scripture,” 296, n. 20).

⁶⁵ Part of Westminster Confession 1:5 reads, “...our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts” [Westminster Divines, “The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)”].

⁶⁶ Grudem, “The Perspicuity of Scripture,” 303–304.

⁶⁷ Thompson, “Generous Gift,” 637.

⁶⁸ “The Perspicuity of Scripture,” 307.

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WILD WEST EVANGELICAL HERMENEUTICS

PART TWO: JESUS CHRIST AND THE SUPREME AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

HENRY B. SMITH JR.

It is nonsense to speak of the unique and total authority of Scripture at the same time as we change our interpretation of Scripture to accord with theories drawn from outside Scripture....

...The basic question is whether our interpretation of the Bible is to be determined by the Bible itself or by some other authority. Once science has been set up as an autonomous authority it inevitably tends to determine the way in which we interpret the Bible. From the point of view of this discussion the outside authority may be Newton or Hoyle just as well as Darwin or Kant. The issue involved is still the same.¹

REVIEW OF PART ONE

In “The Failure of the Comparative Archaeological Method” (CAM), I proposed that CAM has opened the floodgates for a hermeneutical Wild West in evangelical OT scholarship. The methodology reduces divine revelation to a level at or below that of human intellectual reflection, negates the clarity and sufficiency of Scripture, centers the locus of interpretive authority in the human mind, and removes the Holy Spirit as Scripture’s authorized interpretive mediator by replacing Him with the ANE scholar. In attempting to dialogue with the critical-biblical world, evangelicals have too often absorbed its metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions and have resorted to treating the Bible “just like any other ancient text.” But—as I stressed in part one—the Bible is not just any other ancient text. It is the speech of the infinite, eternal, holy, omniscient, omnipresent Creator, the Lord of heaven and earth. CAM does not—indeed it *cannot*—allow Scripture to stand as Scripture.

Here in part two, we will examine CAM further and see how the problems with the method only deepen. Scripture’s own self-attesting witness and the extensive expositions on Scriptural authority generated by the Church historic are nullified by CAM for the mirage of methodological neutrality. That being the case, CAM negates the unique and total authority of Scripture. This method’s assumptions also contradict Jesus’s views of Scripture and His attitude toward man-made traditions elevated to the level of Scripture. After discussing that, we will begin to explore the exceedingly problematic ways evangelical scholars treat Genesis 1–11, and particularly the ways they treat the patriarchal life spans. The discussion and analysis will carry over into part three and find its conclusion there.



“One of the ways [Satan] attacks is by saying that the Scriptures aren’t enough to know the sum of Christian teaching and life, that something more must be added to give us a fuller picture of God’s intentions. It’s an old trick. He said as much at the beginning of time when he tempted Eve with greater wisdom than what God had given her through his spoken Word (Genesis 3:5).”⁶⁷ —Bryan Flamme

Before we dive in, I would like to take a moment to emphasize that my disagreement with professing evangelicals who apply CAM to the OT is not merely an intramural squabble about the interpretation of individual biblical passages. I am not primarily concerned with matters such as the date of the Exodus/Conquest or the patriarchal life spans per se. While these subjects are of great importance, the problem I am attempting to address is of even greater importance. The evangelical use of hermeneutical methods that lead the Church

away from the genuine meaning of biblical texts when those texts have been carefully exegeted and interpreted within their broader canonical context is an alarming trend. Using my example from part one, a 12th- or 13th-century BC Exodus/Conquest cannot be derived from Holy Scripture. These dates are derived from and grounded in external truth claims. If Scripture lacked a precise and detailed chronology for this era in redemptive history, then the debate could legitimately shift to interpretations of the relevant archaeological evidence. But since Scripture is the Word of God, and since it decisively and clearly speaks on the subject, then related archaeological evidence must be understood in the light of Scripture's chronology, and not vice versa. The 12th- and 13th-century dates are hermeneutically dependent on methodological constructs that replace God's divine authority with human authority. *That* is the issue at hand here.

JESUS CHRIST AND HOLY SCRIPTURE: A SINGLE FOUNT OF INFALLIBLE, DIVINE AUTHORITY

Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, *is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches*: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.²

The unique authority of Scripture has been summarized in declarations like the Chicago Statement (cited above) and has been explicated at great length throughout Church history. The body of supporting scholarship on the authority of Scripture is massive, and I urge the reader to carefully explore some of the sources provided in the endnotes here and in part one.³ In these works, inerrancy,⁴ infallibility,⁵ clarity,⁶ sufficiency,⁷ and authority are demonstrated to be essential attributes of Holy Scripture, and to be closely interrelated with and dependent upon one another. Moreover, these attributes are all inseparable from the Person of God Himself. The words of Scripture ultimately originate from and rest in the very nature of the triune God Who has spoken in Scripture.

The subject of Scriptural authority could take our discussion in many different directions. Over the course of fifteen centuries, the Israelites display for us the catastrophic consequences that flow from syncretizing and equating human ideas, philosophies, traditions, religious practices, and thought forms with divine revelation. Because of space limitations, however, I would like to focus on two key places in Scripture where external truth claims and biblical revelation explicitly intersect.

The first place is in the apostle Paul's exaltation of Christ in Colossians. The Spirit of God speaking through Paul warns

the Church against merging or equating any extra-biblical philosophy with biblical revelation. Weeks observes: "Paul's argument is quite simple. All was made by Christ (Col. 1:15-17). Hence we should turn to Christ as our authority (Col. 2:1-23). Revelation through other mediums such as angels, visions (2:18), philosophy and tradition are rejected. The authoritative source is Christ."⁸

An initial objection to drawing on these verses might look like this: Paul is speaking of Christ, not Scripture. We soon discover that this objection is fallacious. Christ is God the Son in human flesh. The same Holy Spirit Who is speaking in Scripture also proceeds eternally from both the Father and the Son (Jn 14:26, 15:26).⁹ That being the case, the words of Scripture are also the words of the Son. Therefore, since Scripture speaks from Genesis to Revelation, Christ speaks from Genesis to Revelation. The authority of Christ and the authority of Scripture are inseparable. The Chicago Statement expresses the matter in this way:

By authenticating each other's authority, Christ and Scripture coalesce into a single fount of authority. The Biblically interpreted Christ and the Christ-centered, Christ-proclaiming Bible are from this standpoint one. As from the fact of inspiration we infer that what Scripture says, God says,¹⁰ so from the revealed relation between Jesus Christ and Scripture we may equally declare that what Scripture says, Christ says.¹¹

So, for example, when God-breathed Scripture (2 Tm 3:16) says that Noah died at 950 years of age (Gn 9:28-29), *Christ says that Noah died at 950 years of age*. I will return to this idea later and in part three, but for now, I would like to ask the reader to briefly meditate on this critical point before reading further.

A second objection may then follow: first-century philosophy and its truth claims have nothing to do with modern ANE scholarship and its truth claims. In the particulars, this is correct. But the objection would almost totally miss the larger meaning and point of Paul's argument, and of mine. The human ideas Paul mentions are ultimately the product of philosophical/worldview reflections about the created order. Archaeological discoveries and human interpretations thereof are also ultimately the products of the created order since they are generated by the mind of man. And, as I have repeatedly emphasized, archaeological evidence is never interpreted in a vacuum of neutrality. Prior worldview commitments always govern the interpretation of empirical observations and raw data.¹² Moreover, ANE scholars operate with a wide variety of presuppositions about the origin, canonization, transmission, and preservation of the OT. These a priori assumptions drastically impact the evaluation of archaeological artifacts and how they relate to the OT text. Critical scholarship

The words of Scripture ultimately originate from and rest in the very nature of the triune God Who has spoken in Scripture.

denies the inspired and providential work of the triune God Who sovereignly directed (and still directs) the entire process involving Scripture. This denial of the triune God's activity is an essential element of CAM. Thus, when evangelicals apply CAM to the Bible, they are smuggling anti-theistic presuppositions into their hermeneutics.

Paul places all ancient or modern intellectual reflection¹³ under the preeminence and authority of Christ/Scripture. In Christ we may find "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3). He is "the head of all rule and authority" (2:10). Indeed, the Christian must "take every thought captive" (2 Cor 10:5b) and subject every idea to the authority of Christ/Scripture. This captive-taking is not limited to moral or ethical thought. It encompasses all Christian thought, including how professing-Christian scholars and laymen alike relate external archaeological evidence to Scripture. Truth claims about ANE evidence therefore qualify as being subsumed under the category of "human tradition" that Paul warns us about in 2:8: "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ."¹⁴

A QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

What goes before is not to say that ANE archaeologists do not make accurate empirical observations. Obviously, they do. Pottery is pottery. Scarabs are scarabs. A coin is a coin. A wall is a wall. But even these designations, *and especially their meaning, their significance, and how they relate to the biblical text*, are not self-interpreting. And they are often the subject of intense scholarly dispute. Moreover, once a human thought form of any kind is activated in the mind of man and related to biblical revelation, the question of the hierarchy of authority immediately takes center stage.

Since Scripture originates from the mind of the infallible and infinite Creator and is "of infallible divine authority on all matters upon which it touches," the only proper way to relate archaeological evidence to Scripture is by first recognizing Scripture's unique origin and authority. Scripture is the infallible, inerrant, authoritative *norma normans sed non normata*—"the norming norm that is not normed." It is "the rule that rules."¹⁵ Here, we can refer back to Collett's formulation: "In the 'dialogue' between Scripture and its external milieu, there is a hierarchy of contextual authority that obtains when it comes to the determination of biblical meaning. Biblical context is master, and the Bible's external historical context is servant."¹⁶ When archaeological evidence is utilized in this manner, it can be highly useful for helping us better understand the biblical text and the world from which

it came. But still, external truth claims intersecting with the Bible obtain their authority "only when and where [they are] in conformity to Scripture."¹⁷

Thus, if there is a genuine conflict between a human interpretation of archaeological evidence and Scriptural statements, **then the external truth claim is false**. It is, in the words of Paul, "empty deceit." Regrettably, evangelicals sometimes use ANE archaeological evidence as if it is "the rule that rules." But since ancient artifacts cannot speak for themselves, ANE scholars themselves become the *norma normans*. This is a serious error on multiple levels. The authority of Scripture instead requires that we humble ourselves, step back, reevaluate the evidence, and carefully examine the underlying assumptions that led to interpretations in conflict with Scripture's clear and explicit truth claims. *We are in error, not Scripture. We need reformulation, not Scripture. We need hermeneutical correction, not Scripture.*

This is the approach Associates for Biblical Research has attempted to take in its 50 plus years of archaeological and apologetic ministry, an approach aptly summarized by the Westminster Confession (1:10): "The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined; and in whose sentence we are to rest; can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture."¹⁸

JESUS'S HIGH VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

For the professing Christian who yet remains unsure about Scripture's supreme authority, we can turn to our Lord Jesus for decisive, authoritative, and infallible affirmation. That Jesus held Scripture in the absolute highest regard and above all human intellectual reflection is beyond dispute. He affirmed Scripture's divine origin and treated the sacred text as inerrant, infallible, clear, sufficient,¹⁹ authoritative, and historically reliable. Jesus's commands to obey Scripture, His entire life being the fulfillment of Scripture, and His regular refrains "Have you not read?" and "It is written" all presuppose and affirm Scripture's divine, self-attesting attributes.²⁰

Jesus's exalted view of Scripture applies to the entire scope of redemptive history—the blood of the righteous having been spilt "from the foundation of the world" in the days of Abel (Gn 4:1–16) down to Zechariah (Lk 11:49–51).²¹ Christ treats Adam, Eve, Abel (and, logically, Cain), Noah, Abraham, Lot's wife, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jonah, and Daniel as actual historical persons. In His admonition to forgive perpetually (Mt 18:22), Jesus

Critical scholarship denies the inspired and providential work of the triune God Who sovereignly directed (and still directs) the entire process involving Scripture. This denial of the triune God's activity is an essential element of CAM. Thus, when evangelicals apply CAM to the Bible, they are smuggling anti-theistic presuppositions into their hermeneutics.

reverses the evil Lamech's declaration of vengeance recorded in Genesis 4:24. Noah's Flood is interpreted and understood by Jesus as a historical/theological parallel to the universal and world-destroying judgment to come (Mt 24:30–31, 24:35–51). Whenever there is a dispute or misunderstanding about Scripture, Jesus always places the fault on persons, never on the biblical text. These persons include both “experts” and ordinary people.²² According to Christ, the undisputed author of the Torah is Moses, not a legion of imaginary redactors invented by the machinations of post-Enlightenment critical-biblical scholarship. Jesus declares that “Moses and the Prophets” are sufficient and authoritative, superior even to witnessing a hypothetical man return from death and the afterlife (Lk 16:19–31).²³ If one does not believe what Moses wrote, one cannot believe what Jesus says (Jn 5:45–47; Lk 16:29, 16:31).

To settle disputes about divorce and bring correction to Pharisaic distortions of the Mosaic Law, Jesus appeals to the authority of the marriage covenant as a creation ordinance established by God Himself. He grounds marriage's inviolable nature in the direct, supernatural creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 (Mt 19:3–5; Mk 10:2–9). The portion of Genesis 1:27 that Jesus references—“male and female he created them”—is repeated verbatim by the Holy Spirit through the hand of Moses in Genesis 5:2. For Jesus, the authority and historical authenticity of the God-breathed book of Genesis conclusively settles the matter.

Capable of destroying Satan with His own divine power, Jesus instead submits to His Father and then rebukes and defeats Satan by quoting Scripture (Mt 4:1–11). When the false teacher par excellence twists Holy Scripture, Jesus employs the infallible hermeneutic of drawing on the Scripture itself to bring both correction and rebuke. By appealing to and using Scripture in His confrontation with Satan, Jesus establishes the pattern for His followers for spiritual warfare and submission to the Word of God. In this confrontation, Jesus fulfills that which Adam failed to accomplish in Genesis 3:1–13.²⁴ In John 20:22, in an extraordinary redemptive recapitulation of God's direct, supernatural creation of Adam in Genesis 2:7, Jesus breathes on the disciples and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

The final, authoritative appeal “It is written” is repeatedly employed by Jesus throughout the Gospels. Jesus never appeals to man-made authorities to interpret Scripture correctly. Even in His post-Resurrection state, Jesus personally exposit OT Scripture to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. The threefold division of the canon, that which is written “in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” and is fulfilled in the work and Person of Christ, once again encompasses the scope of redemptive history (Lk 24:25–27, 24:44–47). In that same context, the intrinsic clarity of Scripture is contrasted with the disciples' foolishness and slowness of heart (v. 25). Jesus remedies their interpretive difficulties not by some clever man-made hermeneutical construct, but by opening their minds (v. 45). This divine act anticipates and parallels the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit after Jesus's ascension.²⁵

Jesus's perfect obedience to the will of the Father in His messianic mission fulfills the similarly perfect Word of God (Mt 5:17–20). Our Lord declared that Scripture is utterly unbreakable, even down to singular letters (Jn 10:33–36). “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away,” says the Son of God (Mt 24:35). The phrase “My words” not only refers to Jesus's speech during His earthly ministry, but also to all the words deposited in Holy Scripture. A power great enough to destroy the entire universe could not cause even “one dot of the Law to become void” (Lk 16:17; Mt 5:18).²⁶

COMPARING HUMAN TRUTH CLAIMS WITH SCRIPTURE: AN EXAMPLE FROM MARK 7

According to Jesus, absolutely nothing in all creation is on par with God speaking in Holy Scripture.²⁷ Keeping this at the forefront of our minds, let us turn our attention to an instructive confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes. Since the comparison between Scripture and truth claims generated by sinful man is the subject at hand, the dramatic scene in Mark 7:1–13 is very much germane to this discussion. Here we find Jesus unequivocally excoriating attempts to elevate human ideas to the level of Scripture. What our Lord says in this incident can be further illumined by the broader context of His views on Scripture expressed throughout the Gospels. Moreover, the problem that Jesus is confronting in Mark 7 is even more serious than what appears on the surface of the narrative.

Chapter seven begins with the Pharisees and scribes traveling from Jerusalem to Galilee to entrap Jesus. They have observed that Jesus's disciples eat their food with unwashed hands. “A wave of ritual purity” had swept across Second Temple Judaism,²⁸ adding many man-made requirements to the revealed Law of God (vv. 3–4). These were conscience-binding religious rituals that had been inherited by the Pharisees and scribes from their religious ancestors. These officials' insistence on the washing of hands was not a concern about hygiene; it was about the disciples and Jesus not “holding to the tradition of the elders” (v. 3). Those who failed to do so were considered “defiled” (v. 2). Jesus responds to their charges as follows (vv. 6–9):

“Well did Isaiah [29:13] prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!”

Then, Jesus turns His attention to another tradition that had also usurped the place of Holy Scripture. This one concerned the fifth commandment of the decalogue—“Honor your father and your mother” (v. 10). Jesus once again denounces the Pharisees and the scribes: “You nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that” (v. 13, NIV).

OBSERVATIONS

There are several salient observations we can make regarding this incident. First, these traditions are like the first-century philosophies and human traditions referred to above by Paul in this respect: they are doctrines generated by the mind of man and then placed on par with Scripture. It is noteworthy that Jesus cites Yahweh’s condemnation of Israelite religious syncretism and idolatry through the prophet Isaiah. One can hardly think of an OT prophet who was forced more often to confront the egregious sin of joining of human thought with divine revelation. The religious, moral, and worldview perversities that flowed out of Israelite syncretism are legion. Now, Jesus is condemning the Pharisees and scribes in the same manner because they are essentially doing the exact same thing. Our Lord’s indictment against them reaches its apex in the seven woes of Matthew 23.

The second observation we can make is that the Pharisees and scribes were the small circle of elite experts on the OT. In this sense, they parallel the modern ANE scholar/archaeologist.²⁹ Both groups of experts have taken human traditions and man-made constructs and have either added them to God’s revelation, claimed they are the essential key to understanding God’s revelation, or used them to push aside God’s revelation. The truth found in the Word of God is made void (v. 13), not in the ontological sense, but in the practical sense. It is nullified because a human authority structure is erected in its place. Both the expert and the one who accepts the expert’s claims as authoritative have been cut off from the purity and truth of God’s sacred words. Something else—some human construct—has replaced the primacy and authority of the biblical text. Whether the subject matter is ritual purity, the fifth commandment, the tradition of the elders, the date of the Exodus, or the ages of the patriarchs in Genesis, the result is the same: human truth claims supplant the divine Word.

Third, let us closely observe the progression of thought in Jesus’s rebuke in verses six through nine: equating → replacing → rejecting. The expert first begins by elevating some external truth claim to the level of divine revelation. The teachings of men are **equated** with the Word of God. Whether these teachings are traditions of the elders, doctrines of men, archaeological claims, scientific claims, or hermeneutical claims, it matters not. In each case, the truth claim is elevated to the level of Scripture, where it can also become conscience-binding. Once this door has been flung open, the Word of God can then eventually be **replaced** by external truth claims. Scripture is now subservient to the claims of men. Once this

shift occurs, men are now free to interpret Scripture according to their own personal hermeneutical preferences. I illustrated variations of this phenomenon in part one with our survey of views on Joshua’s Ai and the date of the Exodus.

At this point, perhaps the expert will still try to cognitively cling to some form of biblical authority, since he professes to know Christ. But the expert is also aware of the colossal force of what Scripture claims about itself and what Jesus taught and believed about Scripture. If the expert wishes to hold on to his Christian profession, he cannot help but feel the deep tension and contradiction embedded at the very heart of the authority structure he has erected. Unfortunately, the desire for fidelity to Scripture is often outweighed by the need for academic respectability, by the possibility of being shunned from the guild, by the temptation to innovate beyond what Scripture allows, and by the difficult prospect of admitting that previously

“To read the Scriptures is therefore not primarily to be enrolled in school or to have discovered a more reliable alternative to Wikipedia. It is to stand face-to-face with God. It is to be summoned by the judge of the universe and to be confronted with the powers of the new creation.”⁶⁸ —Sigurd Grindheim

publicized theories were wrong. In any case, the Christian scholar begins operating with a personal and “methodological schizophrenia.”³⁰ The possibility of a further departure from the primacy of Scripture can increase at this point.

The next step involves moving from replacement to **outright rejection**. Observe the progression: Scripture has fallen from its rightful place as master down to equal → slave → outcast. Hopefully, by God’s mercy, this rejection will not encompass the entirety of His revelation, including the core, saving gospel itself. “I can still love Jesus and reject the historicity of the events found in Exodus,” a professing-Christian scholar or layperson might reason. Even though such a position is both cognitively and theologically incoherent, God can still exercise kindness and mercy toward a soul entrapped in such contradictory reasoning. While God is indeed patient, humans should never presume upon His kindness. Putting subversive hermeneutical constructs into practice and applying them to sacred Scripture is fraught with spiritual peril, both for the expert and for the one who accepts the expert’s claims.

A DANGEROUS POSITION

The threat of further or even complete departure from scriptural authority, and of abandoning non-negotiable orthodoxy, is all too real. Peter Enns³¹ and Kenton Sparks³² are two famous and lamentable examples of this apostasy. Both men promote Christological heresy by claiming that Jesus was mistaken about the accuracy of OT revelation. According

to Enns and Sparks, Jesus merely absorbed the erroneous, prescientific thinking of His day deposited in Genesis and instructed the people and His disciples on that faulty basis. But that is OK, reason Enns and Sparks—people can still follow “jesus” if they want to. Disastrously, the “jesus” they proclaim is nothing but a vain apparition, an error-riddled demigod and vacuous idol of their own making. The authentic, infallible Jesus presented to us in sacred Scripture becomes void.

My concern is not just methodological or academic; it is also pastoral. There is a horrendous danger lurking here. An irrevocable fall into apostasy becomes a genuine possibility for anyone who puts himself in this precarious type of hermeneutical position. Comparative archaeological method, like all other doctrines of men, can have catastrophic spiritual consequences for those who subscribe to it and then carry its presuppositions out to their logical ends.

In summary, Jesus’s treatment of the Old Testament during His earthly ministry puts professing-Christian scholars who apply CAM to the Bible in a most precarious and untenable position. Instead of radically redefining orthodox Christology and the doctrine of Scripture, we ought to reexamine comparative archaeological method and (almost) completely reformulate it. What, therefore, should the hermeneutical method employed by the Christian scholar look like? It is rare to find a more eloquent and theologically precise description of a Scripturally grounded hermeneutical method than that of Mark Bowald:

Thus, for reading the Bible, the fundamental question is the shape of the divine economy that underwrites all activity related to the production, reception, and interpretation of Scripture, enveloping and directing the corresponding creaturely noetic activities. The hermeneutical skin we read from as Christians is, therefore, theistic and Trinitarian. It is irrevocably imprinted and shaped by the self-revealing economy of the living Word of the triune God. The primary features of the divine economy under which the composition, canonization, and reading of the Christian Scriptures are given are the risen, seated, ruling Christ and the Spirit sent to inspire his kingdom in the church and the world. The ontology of Scripture and its reading, therefore, are founded and administered by Christ in the offices of his heavenly session at the right hand of the Father, implemented by the Holy Spirit, and underwritten by the providential and paternally elective care of God the Father.³³

In this light, modern evangelical OT interpretative methods desperately need “hermeneutical redemption”!³⁴

GENESIS 1–11

The old saying goes, “It’s going to get worse before it gets better.” This is certainly the case with Genesis 1–11. While CAM has been the focus of discussion thus far, evangelical hermeneutics for Genesis 1–11 are even more strongly

influenced by secular scientific paradigms concerning human and cosmic origins. These paradigms are controlled entirely by philosophical naturalism and are deeply antithetical to the biblical worldview.³⁵ Remarkably, evangelical scholars almost universally allow these worldview paradigms (to varying degrees) to influence their interpretation of the primeval history. Combined also with CAM, this external influence is so pervasive that one is hard-pressed to find published works that deal solely with the sacred text in Genesis and its carefully exegeted meaning within its immediate and broader canonical context.³⁶ Professing evangelicals repeatedly assert that the persons and events recorded in Genesis 1–11 and the precise details associated with both cannot be historical in the same sense that, say, the specific details in the life of David are historical. And never mind what the Son of God and His divinely authorized and inspired apostles have to say in the New Testament about pesky little things like the direct, supernatural creation of Adam and Eve (Mt 19:3–9; Mk 10:6–9; Eph 5:31; Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:21–22, 15:45–49; 2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tm 2:13–14; Lk 3:38), the nature and scope of the Fall (Rom 5:12–14, 8:18–23; Col 1:20; Eph 1:10; Rv 22:3), or the anthropological and geographical extent of Noah’s Flood (Heb 11:7; 1 Pt 3:20; 2 Pt 2:5, 3:1–13).³⁷

I have chosen three brief but instructive examples here, but additional cases would literally fill a book (see the endnotes for further information).³⁸

1. Peter Enns claims that the Creation and Flood accounts are firmly grounded in ancient myth, and that the accounts in Genesis 1–11 *must* first and foremost be understood as derivations of ANE mythological texts.³⁹ Enns’s hermeneutical method allows him to reinterpret virtually the entire Bible, logically catapulting him on a trajectory that disastrously terminates in Christological heresy. He would have us believe that Jesus was a “thoroughly enculturated Jew” who mistakenly believed the Bible’s erroneous version of human and cosmic origins deposited in Genesis. Not surprisingly, Enns also claims that Paul did not view Adam as the first historical man. Instead, Adam was an imaginary archetype or “teaching model.”⁴⁰ Enns has arrived on the scene in the 21st century to tell his readers that he, the ANE archaeologists, and the (secular) scientists know better about such things than the divinely inspired apostles and even Jesus Himself.
2. In an article on the Tower of Babel, Paul Seely walks the reader through the text of Genesis 11:1–9 and also highlights external indicators that the event is placed in a third-millennium BC historical context by the biblical writer. To a large degree, he accurately explains what the sacred text is teaching us: In the days after the universal Flood, there was one universal language among human beings. A population of people gathered at Babel in rebellion against the LORD. God brought judgment

upon the post-Flood world by confusing their singular language into multiple languages, thereby forcing them to disperse across the face of the earth. But what follows in the second half of Seely's article is an extended and somewhat condescending lecture as to why this event cannot possibly have happened in the manner, general timeframe, and place indicated by the biblical author. Modern "science" and archaeology are exalted as essentially infallible, while Genesis 1–11 is deemed an error-ridden product of a prescientific worldview held by a human author imprisoned in an age of ignorance.⁴¹ "For Seely," writes James Scott, "apparently, revelation and inspiration are not part of the biblical writers' experience."⁴² After Seely's deconstruction, what remains is the rotting corpse of hermeneutical deism⁴³ and the idolatrous exaltation of science and archaeology over the authority of sacred Scripture.

3. John Walton literally went on a world tour to promote a structure of biblical interpretation and authority that is virtually unrecognizable when weighed against an orthodox doctrine of Scripture and the words of Jesus Himself. Walton's entire Bible-reconstruction project is built on Immanuel Kant's theory of knowledge.⁴⁴ He insists that no one can properly understand the Bible unless one first understands the ANE context from which it came, which (of course) Walton and other sympathetic scholarly elites must explain to the Church.

The bottom line is this: if one wants to know the truth about Genesis 1–11, put down the Bible and pick up Seely, Walton, Enns, Sparks, or the ANE scholar of your choice.⁴⁵ In effect, it's up to them (and you) how the first eleven chapters of the Bible ought to be interpreted.

PATRIARCHAL LIFE SPANS AND CHRONOLOGY

One major feature of the primeval history that irreconcilably contradicts both the dominant naturalistic paradigm on human origins and conclusions derived from the use of comparative archaeological method is the patriarchal life spans and begetting ages recorded throughout Genesis 5 and 11. Today, many evangelicals deny that the figures allocated to the patriarchs in the two genealogies represent actual, historical ages. However, there is a two-thousand-year-old testimony that speaks decisively against their assertions.

From the third century BC to ca. AD 1800, Christian scholars and their Jewish predecessors almost unanimously understood the patriarchal numbers as genuine ages. They also interpreted the genealogies in Gen 5/11 as yielding a continuous chronology from Adam to Abraham. The earliest writers include the first extant interpreter, Demetrius of Alexandria (220 BC), the Jewish aristocrat Eupolemus (160 BC), the pseudonymous author of *Jubilees* (160 BC), the Hebrew author of *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (first century AD), the exegetes at Qumran (ca. AD 50), and the

Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (AD 90).⁴⁶ Virtually all Christian theologians and historians from the second century through the early 19th century who dated Creation/Adam or commented on the genealogies of Gen 5/11 interpreted the primeval history chronologically. Early and widespread literal/chronological interpreters in the Church include Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Julius Africanus, Hippolytus of Rome, Cyprian of Carthage, Eusebius of Caesarea, the author(s) of the *Chronograph of 354*, Aphrahat, Ephrem of Syria, Hilary of Poitiers, Epiphanius of Salamis, Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine.⁴⁷

With immense pressures from ascending Darwinism and the milieu of post-Enlightenment worldview paradigms, a few 19th-century voices in professing Christendom began questioning the long-standing interpretation.⁴⁸ In 1890, William Green of Princeton challenged the established chronological interpretation in his seminal article "Primeval Chronology."⁴⁹ Largely due to a de facto endorsement by B. B. Warfield,⁵⁰ whose own interpretation of Gen 5/11 was an "eisegetical *tour de force*,"⁵¹ Green's nonchronological interpretation of Gen 5/11 eventually rose to primacy in evangelical OT scholarship. Since the 1950s, evangelicals have largely parroted Green's arguments and variations thereof,⁵² concluding that Gen 5/11 do not yield a chronology of pre-Abrahamic history.⁵³

In attempts to reconcile Gen 5/11 with modern-day scientific and archaeological truth claims, 21st-century evangelical scholars have moved in a different direction by claiming that the patriarchal numbers do not even refer to actual ages. Some contend that the way to properly interpret the sacred text is to uncover clandestine numerical systems that provide the key to understanding the figures assigned to the patriarchs. Thus, the secrets to understanding Gen 5/11 were originally known only to a handful of ancient elites and/or the original human author(s).⁵⁴ Similarly, Casper Labuschagne appeals to the mysticism of Jewish Kabbalah to disclose the riddles previously hidden in the numbers of Gen 5/11.⁵⁵ Harrison and others claim that the numbers assigned

*"We have forgotten that the church has always been under pressure to allegorize Genesis so that it may conform with Plotinus or Aristotle or some other human philosophy. We have treated the problem as though it were a modern one, as though we alone have had to face the onerous task of holding to a view of cosmic and human origins which is out of sympathy with the philosophical premises of our culture."*⁶⁵ —Noel Weeks

to the patriarchs can only be understood once we interpret them with the sexagesimal (sixty-based) numbering system⁵⁶ used in Mesopotamia by the Sumerians centuries before the days of Moses. The Sumerian King List is often used to justify this interpretative maneuver.⁵⁷ Closely related to the claim of a sexagesimal system is the argument that the life spans cannot be actual ages because an examination of their final digits leads to purported statistical improbabilities.⁵⁸ Etz, whose own algebra-based solution fails to deliver the goods, observes:

Many arithmetic schemes have been proposed, but none has been generally accepted. They often involve complex calculations that seem unrelated to the objective, and no single scheme accounts for all the numbers. It seems reasonable to conclude that the numbers are a random set. As noted by Lloyd R. Bailey, *...the attempt to derive the numbers from the base 60 "leaves the vast majority of the numbers unexplained," and equating 60 months with 5 years does not "solve the mystery of the specific ages."*⁵⁹

Renowned Christian apologist William Lane Craig categorizes significant portions of Genesis 1–11 as “mytho-history.” The patriarchal life spans are conveniently included in the “mytho” portion of this recently invented genre designation.⁶⁰ Other professing evangelicals claim that the numbers are symbolic and/or (partially) consist of “blocks of honorific formulae.”⁶¹ As such, the numbers were ostensibly intended (in some way) to pay homage to the patriarchs, but are not actual ages.⁶² Abraham’s 175-year life span (Gn 25:7–8) and 100-year begetting age at Isaac’s birth (Gn 17:17) are now deemed symbolic and/or honorific, or are said to have an unknown and perhaps never-to-be-discovered meaning. Joseph’s life span of 110 years (Gn 50:26) is also a symbolic figure, and its meaning is derived directly from ancient Egyptian theological and worldview claims.⁶³ We can also add Moses to this list. He did not live to the age of 120 years.⁶⁴

Genesis and the rest of the biblical canon know nothing of these man-made hermeneutical innovations. Each one immediately melts away in the searing light of Scripture’s self-authenticating witness and of the supreme and infallible authority that Jesus Himself ascribed to the written Word of God. A critique can extend well beyond the doctrinal malignancy embedded in CAM and its pernicious hermeneutical consequences. A close examination exposes additional intractable problems with nonliteral interpretations of the patriarchal life spans:

- Intertestamental Judaism and the Church prior to the mid-19th century testify against them.
- A careful exegesis of crucial biblical texts renders nonliteral interpretations incoherent.
- Literal life spans and a chronological interpretation

of Gen 5/11 precisely place Methuselah’s death in the year of the Flood.

- The integration of the chronology of Noah’s life into the Flood narrative can only be explained exegetically by an actual, historical life span of 950 years.
- The birth of Arpachshad two years after the Flood chronologically integrates the lives of Noah, Shem, and Arpachshad together, and can only be coherently explained by literal life spans for each patriarch.
- Moses personally testifies that he is 120 years old just prior to his death.
- The Holy Spirit in Romans 4:19 and Acts 7 treats Abraham’s and Moses’s life spans as literal.
- Romans 15:4 demands that the true meaning of the God-breathed numbers in Genesis 5 and 11 was already known to the covenant people of God in the first century AD, and thus nullifies evangelical hermeneutical methods now being used to reinterpret the numbers.

These points will be examined in detail in part three.

“The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.”⁶⁶
—The Westminster Confession of Faith 1:4



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Notes

¹ Noel K. Weeks, “The Hermeneutical Problem of Genesis 1-11,” *Themelios* 4/1 (September 1978): 13, 16, <http://tgc-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/themelios/Themelios4.1.pdf>. Republished in *Bible and Spade* 33/4 (Fall 2020).

² International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, November 1978, <https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI-1978-11-07.pdf> (emphasis added).

³ Some salient examples of such works on Scripture’s authority include B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1948); John S. Feinberg, “Divine Commanding Light: The Authority of Scripture,” in *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 387–425; D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, Theology of Lordship 4 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010); Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, from Dutch, vol. 1: *Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 283–494; Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *God’s Word in Servant-Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of Scripture* (Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic, 2008); John Murray, “The Attestation of Scripture,” in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1967), 1–54; Edward J. Young, “The Authority of the Old Testament,” in Stonehouse and Woolley, *Infallible Word*, 55–91; Ned B. Stonehouse, “The Authority of the New Testament,” in Stonehouse and Woolley, *Infallible Word*, 92–140; Edward J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth: Some Thoughts on the Biblical Doctrine of Inspiration* (London: Banner of Truth, 1957); J. I. Packer, ‘Fundamentalism’ and the Word of God: *Some Evangelical Principles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 41–74; Nigel M. de S. Cameron, “The Logic of Biblical Authority,” in *The Challenge of Evangelical Theology: Essays in Approach and Method*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1987), 1–16; John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Sigurd Grindheim, “Biblical Authority: What Is It Good For? Why the Apostles Insisted on a High View of Scripture,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59/4 (December 2016): 791–803; D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005); Harvie M. Conn, ed., *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, a Challenge, a Debate* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988); D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992); K. Scott Oliphint, “Because It Is the Word of God,” in *Did God Really Say? Affirming the Truthfulness and Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. David B. Garner (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012), 1–22; John Owen,

The Divine Original: Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Power of the Scriptures, Owen’s Collected Works 16 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1988) (for a summary of Owen’s views, see Barry H. Howson, “The Puritan Hermeneutics of John Owen: A Recommendation,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 63/2 [Fall 2001]: 351–76); William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture: Against the Papists, Especially Bellarmine and Stapleton*, ed. and trans. William Fitzgerald, from Latin (Cambridge, 1588; Cambridge, 1849) (citations refer to the 1849 edition); Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 of 4: *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003). Many additional sources can be found in the following anthology of 1300+ pages: Peter A. Lillback and Richard B. Gaffin Jr., eds., *Thy Word Is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013).

⁴ “By [“inerrant”] we mean that the Scriptures possess the quality of freedom from error. They are exempt from the liability to mistake, incapable of error. In all their teachings they are in perfect accord with the truth” (Young, *Thy Word Is Truth*, 113).

⁵ Young explains:

By the term infallible as applied to the Bible, we mean simply that the Scripture possesses an indefectible authority. As the Lord himself said “it cannot be broken” (John 10:35). It can never fail in its judgments and statements. All that it teaches is of unimpeachable, absolute authority, and cannot be contravened, contradicted, or gainsaid. Scripture is unfailing, incapable of proving false, erroneous, or mistaken. (113)

⁶ “The clarity of Scripture is that quality of Scripture which, arising from the fact that it is ultimately God’s effective communicative act, ensures the meaning of each biblical text, when viewed in the context of the canonical whole, is accessible to all who come to it in faith and dependent upon the Holy Spirit” (Mark D. Thompson, “The Generous Gift of a Gracious Father: Toward a Theological Account of the Clarity of Scripture,” in Carson, *Enduring Authority*, 618).

⁷ See part one, pp. 25–27.

⁸ Noel K. Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture* (1988; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1998), 19 (citations refer to the 1998 edition). Some of my reflections in this section are derived from Weeks’s incisive arguments.

⁹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 72–78.

¹⁰ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 299–348.

¹¹ International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, *Chicago Statement*.

¹² We could press the matter even further here and insist that, in a robust biblical worldview, there is no such thing as

“raw data.” The most basic bits of data are not, in the words of Cornelius Van Til, “brute facts.” K. Scott Oliphint explains: “Thus, for Van Til, *there are no brute facts, not because every fact carries our interpretation with it, but because every fact is a created fact*. As created, every fact carries with it God’s interpretation. God speaks the facts themselves into existence, and he speaks through all that he has created” (Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008], 18 n. 78) (emphasis added).

¹³ Some human philosophies may also originate from demonic deception.

¹⁴ “How are men to be brought into contact with that wisdom? It is through the apostolic teaching. Once again Scripture, when it considers the matter, directs us to special revelation” (Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture*, 20).

¹⁵ Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), s.vv. “norma normans,” “norma normans sed non normata.”

¹⁶ Don Collett, “Hermeneutics in Context: Comparative Method and Contemporary Evangelical Scholarship,” Trinity School for Ministry: An Evangelical Seminary in the Anglican Tradition, October 29, 2010, p. 5, http://www.tsm.edu/2010/10/29/hermeneutics_in_context_comparative_method_and_contemporary_evangelical_scholarship/.

¹⁷ Oliphint, “Because It Is the Word,” 7. In this context, Oliphint is referring to the Westminster Confession, but the principle he expresses can apply to any interaction between Scripture and human statements about or intersecting with Scripture.

¹⁸ Westminster Divines, “The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647),” Ligonier Ministries: The Teaching Fellowship of R.C. Sproul, May 12, 2021, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-confession-faith/>.

¹⁹ “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4, citing Dt 8:3). For more on sufficiency, see Jeremiah Johnson, ed., *One Foundation: Essays on the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Valencia CA: Grace to You, 2019); Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture*; J. Ligon Duncan III, “The Sufficient Word of God,” in *Solid Ground: The Inerrant Word of God in an Errant World*, ed. Gabriel N. E. Fluhrer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012), 19–38.

²⁰ For more on the principle of self-attesting authority, see Matthew Scott Wireman, “The Self-Attestation of Scripture as the Proper Ground for Systematic Theology” (PhD Dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012); Wayne A. Grudem, “Scripture’s Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture,” in Carson and Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth*, 15–59; Thompson, “Generous Gift,” 622 n. 29; John Murray, “The Attestation of Scripture”; Associates for Biblical Research, “The Doctrine of Scripture (Part One),” *Digging for Truth*, episode 77, January 5, 2020, video, 25:59, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pVGGOpuoK8>; Associates for Biblical Research, “The Doctrine of Scripture (Part Two),” *Digging for Truth*, episode 78, January 12, 2020, video, 25:59, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTS0PKsMHxU>.

²¹ In using the expression “from the foundation of the world,” Jesus is affirming that humans were created and lived when the world itself was created. The same expression is found in Matthew 13:35, 25:34; John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 4:3, 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20; and Revelation 13:8 and 17:8. Paul indicates that the knowledge of God has been perceived through the created order by human beings “ever since the creation of the world.” The phrase temporally places mankind at the beginning (Rom 1:20). See C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 of 2: *Introduction and Commentary on Romans I–VIII*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments 32 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975; New York: T&T Clark, 2001), 114 (citation refers to the 2001 edition).

²² Wayne A. Grudem (*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 106) notes:

In a day when it is common for people to tell us how hard it is to interpret Scripture rightly, we would do well to remember that not once in the Gospels do we ever hear Jesus saying anything like this: “I see how your problem arose—the Scriptures are not very clear on that subject.” Instead, whether he is speaking to scholars or untrained common people, his responses always assume that the blame for misunderstanding any teaching of Scripture is not to be placed on the Scriptures themselves, but on those who misunderstand or fail to accept what is written. Again and again he answers questions with statements like, “Have you not read ...” (Matt. 12:3, 5; 19:14; 22:31), “Have you never read in the Scriptures ...” (Matt. 21:42), or even, “You are wrong because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29; cf. Matt. 9:13; 12:7; 15:3; 21:13; John 3:10; et al.).

²³ The apostle Peter similarly asserts that the Word of God is surer than his own personal witness to the transfigured Jesus (2 Pt 1:16–21).

²⁴ These allusions to Adam’s fall are more explicitly drawn out by the apostle Paul in Romans 5:12–21 and in 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 and 15:45–49.

²⁵ God’s divine activity in inculcating understanding of His truth in persons is also reflected in Job 33:16; Psalms 40:6; 119:18; Acts 16:14; 1 John 5:20; and Isaiah 50:5.

²⁶ Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to empower selected disciples to write the New Testament covenant documents: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, *he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you*” (Jn 14:26). This same idea is also indicated in John 16:12–15:

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, *he will guide you into all the truth*, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, *for*

he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

²⁷ I refer the reader to the following sources, which support my assertions and examine Jesus's views of Scripture in much greater detail: Thompson, "Generous Gift," 624–32; Craig L. Blomberg, "Reflections on Jesus' View of the Old Testament," in Carson, *Enduring Authority*, 669–701; John W. Wenham, "Christ's View of Scripture," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 3–38; John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009); Clark H. Pinnock, "The Inspiration of Scripture and the Authority of Jesus Christ," in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Newburgh, IN: Trinity, 1974), 201–18 (note: sadly, Pinnock eventually embraced open theism and rejected the views expressed in this contribution); Ned B. Stonehouse, "The Authority of the Old Testament and the Authority of Christ," in Lillback and Gaffin, *Thy Word*, 1015–1033.

²⁸ See Dr. Scott Stripling discuss this phenomenon in Associates for Biblical Research, "Ritual Purity in the Days of Jesus," *Digging for Truth*, episode 91, June 14, 2020, video, 26:01, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQ4H66oiT9g>.

²⁹ Note: I am NOT calling Christian ANE scholars "pharisees." What I am saying is that my brethren are, in principle, making the same egregious error.

³⁰ Collett, "Hermeneutics in Context," 17.

³¹ James W. Scott, "The Inspiration and Interpretation of God's Word, with Special Reference to Peter Enns: Part I; Inspiration and Its Implications," *Westminster Theological Journal* 71/1 (Spring 2009): 129–83; Scott, "The Inspiration and Interpretation of God's Word, with Special Reference to Peter Enns: Part II; The Interpretation of Representative Passages," *Westminster Theological Journal* 71/2 (Fall 2009): 247–79; Collett, "Hermeneutics in Context," 29–31.

³² David B. Garner, "Did God Really Say?," in Garner, *Affirming the Truthfulness*, 133–35.

³³ Mark Alan Bowald, "Rendering Mute the Word: Overcoming Deistic Tendencies in Modern Hermeneutics; Kevin Vanhoozer as a Test Case," *Westminster Theological Journal* 69/2 (Fall 2007): 367.

³⁴ Vern Sheridan Poythress, "The Presence of God Qualifying Our Notions of Grammatical-Historical Interpretation: Genesis 3:15 as a Test Case," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50/1 (March 2007): 102. I highly recommend this easy-to-read yet incisive and penetrating article.

³⁵ My own brief critique of this problem is found in Henry B. Smith Jr., "Cosmic Death in Romans 8: Affirming a Recent Creation," *Bible and Spade* 26/1 (Winter 2013): 8–14. The impossibility of integrating theistic evolution with biblical revelation and the gospel, for example, has been addressed in detail in J. P. Moreland et al., eds., *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017). Also Hans Madueme, "The Theological

Problem with Evolution," *Zygon* 56/2 (May 2021): 481–99.

³⁶ A notable and refreshing departure from this condition available [in the ABR bookstore](#) is Gerald A. Klingbeil, ed., *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015). Also Cornelis Van Dam, *In the Beginning: Listening to Genesis 1 and 2* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020).

³⁷ We should also see in the miraculous events of Pentecost a sign of the future and permanent reversal of the universal confusion of languages at Babel (Gn 11:1–9; Acts 2:1–11).

³⁸ For critiques of some of the problematic methodologies and arguments employed by evangelical scholars, see Noel K. Weeks, "The Bible and the 'Universal' Ancient World: A Critique of John Walton," *Westminster Theological Journal* 78/1 (Spring 2016): 1–28; Weeks, "Problems with the Comparative Method in Old Testament Studies," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62/2 (June 2019): 287–306; Weeks, "Cosmology in Historical Context," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68/2 (Fall 2006): 283–93; Weeks, "The Ambiguity of Biblical 'Background,'" *Westminster Theological Journal* 72/2 (Fall 2010): 219–36; Weeks, "Hermeneutical Problem"; Todd S. Beall, "Contemporary Hermeneutical Approaches to Genesis 1–11," in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008), 131–62; Beall, "Genesis 1–11: A Plea for Hermeneutical Consistency," *Bible and Spade* 29/2 (Spring/Summer 2016): 68–75; Beall, "Evangelicalism, Inerrancy, and Current OT Scholarship," *Bible and Spade* 28/1 (Winter 2015): 18–24; Beall, "The Hermeneutics of Adam: A Figurative Approach to Genesis 1 and the Historicity of Adam," *Answers Research Journal* 11 (2018): 23–29; William VanDoodewaard, "The Lost Word, and the Lost World," *Bible and Spade* 30/1 (Winter 2017): 21–24; William VanDoodewaard, *The Quest for the Historical Adam: Genesis, Hermeneutics, and Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015); Richard D. Lanser Jr., "The Influence of the Ancient Near East on the Book of Genesis," *Bible and Spade* 23/4 (Fall 2010): 95–99; Angel M. Rodriguez, "Ancient Near Eastern Parallels to the Bible and the Question of Revelation and Inspiration," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 12/1 (2001): 43–64; Thomas Purifoy Jr., "The Gnostic World of John Walton," *Bible and Spade* 33/3 (Summer 2020): 18–27; Klingbeil, *Genesis Creation Account*.

³⁹ Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). For a critique of Enns, see Scott, "Inspiration and Interpretation," (pts. 1 and 2); G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008); Hans Madueme, "Some Reflections on Enns and *The Evolution of Adam: A Review Essay*," review of *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins*, by Peter Enns, *Themelios* 37/2 (July 2012): 275–86. Many other critiques of Enns have been written.

⁴⁰ For a refutation of Enns on this characterization of Adam,

see J. P. Versteeg, *Adam in the New Testament: Mere Teaching Model or First Historical Man?*, trans. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., from Dutch, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012).

⁴¹ Paul H. Seely, “The Date of the Tower of Babel and Some Theological Implications,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 63/1 (Spring 2001): 15–38. Seely wrote several similar articles on Genesis 1–11. For a devastating critique of Seely’s methodology, his errors, and his distortions of the views of John Calvin, B. B. Warfield, and Charles Hodge, see Scott, “Inspiration and Interpretation” (pts. 1 and 2). Scott eventually concludes, “Indeed, we have seen Seely misrepresent his sources so often that one should hesitate to accept anything that he says about them without independent verification” (“Inspiration and Interpretation” [pt. 2], 253 n. 4). Weeks also critiques Seely in “Cosmology in Historical Context.”

⁴² “Inspiration and Interpretation” (pt. 2), 250 n. 8.

⁴³ For more on hermeneutical deism, see Bowald, “Rendering Mute the Word,” 367–81.

⁴⁴ For Kant’s impact on modern hermeneutics, see Royce Gordon Gruenler, *Meaning and Understanding: The Philosophical Framework for Biblical Interpretation*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 21–109; Bowald, “Rendering Mute the Word,” 368–73. Nathaniel Gray Sutanto explains the influence of Kant on Barthian neo-orthodoxy and “theological hermeneutics” (“On the Theological Interpretation of Scripture: The Indirect Identity Thesis, Reformed Orthodoxy, and Trinitarian Considerations,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 77/2 [Fall 2015]: 337–53). Walton’s arguments have been extensively rebutted from both an evidential and a theological perspective. See Purifoy, “Gnostic World”; Weeks, “‘Universal’ Ancient World”; Weeks, “Problems”; VanDoodewaard, “Lost Word”; Lanser, “The Influence”; Hans Madueme, “Adam and Eve: An Evangelical Impasse?—A Review Essay,” review of *Saving the Original Sinner: How Christians Have Used the Bible’s First Man to Oppress, Inspire, and Make Sense of the World*, by Karl W. Giberson, *The Quest for the Historical Adam: Genesis, Hermeneutics, and Human Origins*, by William VanDoodewaard, and *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate*, by John H. Walton, *Christian Scholar’s Review* 45/2 (Winter 2016): 165–83.

⁴⁵ Another especially well-known example is N. T. Wright, who no doubt believes that “the scholar is the final arbiter of historical truth,” not Scripture. For more, see John M. Frame, “N. T. Wright and the Authority of Scripture,” in Garner, *Affirming the Truthfulness*, 125; 107–27; D. A. Carson, “Three More Books on the Bible: A Critical Review,” review of *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*, by John Webster, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*, by Peter Enns, and *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture*, by N. T. Wright, in *Collected Writings on Scripture*, comp. Andrew David Naselli (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 283–301. Wright’s methodology is ultimately undergirded by the illegitimate divorce between the authority of God and the authority of Scripture. Once this bifurcation is permitted, the mind of man

does its inevitable work of biblical deconstruction.

⁴⁶ Outside of the possible exception of Philo of Alexandria with his pervasive allegorical exegesis, I am aware of no other writer from this early period who departed from the chronological interpretation of Gen 5/11 and the subsequent patriarchal narratives of Genesis.

⁴⁷ These sources are documented in articles for the [Genesis 5 and 11 Research Project](#). Extensive documentation will be found in my forthcoming book, *From Adam to Abraham*.

⁴⁸ For a historical sketch, see Jeremy Sexton, “Evangelicalism’s Search for Chronological Gaps in Genesis 5 and 11: A Historical, Hermeneutical, and Linguistic Critique,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61/1 (March 2018): 5–25.

⁴⁹ William Henry Green, “Primeval Chronology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 47/185 (April 1890): 285–303.

⁵⁰ Sexton, “Evangelicalism’s Search.”

⁵¹ Benjamin Shaw, “The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 and Their Significance for Chronology” (PhD Dissertation, Bob Jones University, 2004), 133. See B. B. Warfield, “On the Antiquity and the Unity of the Human Race,” *Princeton Theological Review* 9/1 (January 1911): 1–25.

⁵² Examples in the conservative literature are legion. See, for example, the well-known Christian apologist William Lane Craig (“#660: The Genealogies of Genesis 1–11,” Reasonable Faith, December 15, 2019, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/the-genealogies-of-genesis-1-11>).

⁵³ For detailed refutations of Green’s arguments and modern evangelical variations thereof, see Smith B. Goodenow, *Bible Chronology, Carefully Unfolded* (New York: Revell, 1896); C. G. Ozanne, *The First 7000 Years: A Study in Bible Chronology* (New York: Exposition, 1970), 207–21; Gerhard F. Hasel, “Genesis 5 and 11: Chronogenealogies in the Biblical History of Beginnings,” *Origins* 7/1 (1980): 23–37; Samuel R. Külling, *Are the Genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 Historical and Complete, That Is, Without Gaps?* (Reihen, Switzerland: Immanuel-Verlag, 1996); J. Paul Tanner, “Old Testament Chronology and Its Implications for the Creation and Flood Accounts,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172/685 (January–March 2015): 24–44; Jeremy Sexton, “Who Was Born When Enosh Was 90? A Semantic Reevaluation of William Henry Green’s Chronological Gaps,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 77/2 (Fall 2015): 193–218; Jeremy Sexton and Henry B. Smith Jr., “Primeval Chronology Restored: Revisiting the Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11,” *Bible and Spade* 29/2 (Spring/Summer 2016): 42–49; Bernard White, “Revisiting Genesis 5 and 11: A Closer Look at the Chronogenealogies,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 53/2 (Fall 2015): 253–77; White, “Adam to Joshua: Tracing a Paragenealogy,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 54/1 (Spring 2016): 3–29; White, “Schematized or Non-Schematized: The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 54/2 (Fall 2016): 205–35; Sexton, “Evangelicalism’s Search”; Jeremy Sexton, “Andrew E. Steinmann’s Search for Chronological Gaps in Genesis 5 and 11: A Rejoinder,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61/1 (March 2018): 39–45.

⁵⁴ Gerhard Larsson, *The Secret System: A Study in the Chronology of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); Jeremy

Northcote, "The Schematic Development of Old Testament Chronography: Towards an Integrated Model," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29/1 (September 2004): 3–36; Jeremy Northcote, "The Lifespans of the Patriarchs: Schematic Orderings in the Chrono-genealogy," *Vetus Testamentum* 57/2 (2007): 243–57; Colin L. House, "The Successive, Corresponding Epochal Arrangement of the 'Chronogenealogies' of Genesis 5 and 11B in the Three Textual Traditions: LXXA, SP, and MT" (PhD Dissertation, Andrews University, 1988).

⁵⁵ Casper J. Labuschagne, *Numerical Secrets of the Bible: Introduction to Biblical Arithmology* (North Richland Hills, TX: Bibal, 2000; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016) (citation refers to the Wipf & Stock edition). Duane L. Christensen appeals to Labuschagne to support a similar argument ("Did People Live to Be Hundreds of Years Old Before the Flood? NO," in *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions About Creation and the Flood*, ed. Ronald Youngblood [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999] [citations refer to the Wipf & Stock edition]).

⁵⁶ Shaw explains this system:

The sexagesimal system is a system of mathematics based on the number 60, as the modern "decimal" system is based on the number 10. Thus, in the sexagesimal system numbers are counted in units of sixty rather than units of ten. For example, in the decimal system the number "111" represents 1 unit of 10^2 (one hundred) plus 1 unit of 10^1 (ten) plus 1 unit of 10^0 (one), for a total of one hundred eleven. In the sexagesimal system, the number "111" represents 1 unit of 60^2 (thirty-six hundred) plus one unit of 60^1 (sixty) plus 1 unit of 60^0 (one), for a total of three thousand six hundred sixty one [sic]. The sexagesimal system was widely used in Sumeria and later in Babylon ("Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11," 139–40 n. 14).

⁵⁷ R. K. Harrison, "Reinvestigating the Antediluvian Sumerian King List," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36/1 (March 1993): 3–8; R. K. Harrison, "From Adam to Noah: A Reconsideration of the Antediluvian Patriarchs' Ages," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37/2 (June 1994): 161–68; Christensen, "NO," 166–83; Dwight Wayne Young, "The Influence of Babylonian Algebra on Longevity Among the Antediluvians," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 102/3 (1990): 321–35; Dwight Wayne Young, "The Sexagesimal Basis for the Total Years of the Antediluvian and Postdiluvian Epochs," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 116/4 (October 2004): 502–27. See also Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams, from Hebrew, *Part I: From Adam to Noah; A Commentary on Genesis I—VI 8* (Skokie, IL: Varda Books, 2005). For critiques of Cassuto and this argument generally, see Shaw, "Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11," 134–74; Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 and Their Alleged Babylonian Background," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 16/2 (1978): 361–74.

⁵⁸ Such arguments are made by David E. Graves, *Biblical Archaeology 1: An Introduction with Recent Discoveries*

That Support the Reliability of the Bible, 2nd rev. ed. (New Brunswick, Canada: David E. Graves, 2014), 109–11; Carol A. Hill, "Making Sense of the Numbers of Genesis," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 55/4 (December 2003); Kenton L. Sparks, "Genesis 1–11 as Ancient Historiography," in *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither? Three Views on the Bible's Earliest Chapters*, ed. Charles Halton, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 120. For decisive refutations, see White, "Schematized or Non-Schematized," 218–22; Richard Peachey, "The British Monarchy: Contrived History? A *Reductio Ad Absurdum* Argument in Defense of Those 'Incredible' Age Numbers in Genesis 5 and 11," Creation Science Association of British Columbia, January 16, 2017, <https://creationbc.org/index.php/the-british-monarchy-contrived-history/>; Walter Makous, "Biblical Longevities: Empirical Data or Fabricated Numbers?" *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 63/2 (June 2011).

⁵⁹ Donald V. Etz, "The Numbers of Genesis V 3–31: A Suggested Conversion and Its Implications," *Vetus Testamentum* 43/2 (April 1993): 177 (emphasis added).

⁶⁰ "Genealogies of Genesis 1–11." Craig's argument can be seen in a series of YouTube videos: William Lane Craig, *Defenders 3: Excursus on Creation of Life & Biological Diversity*, Reasonable Faith, last updated March 25, 2021, 32 videos, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIpO3BUiq2IFZ4yKB8Qk5Hs8Mohv-v1hr>. In Craig's most recently published book (*In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021]), he relegates most of Genesis 1–11 to "mytho-history."

⁶¹ A helpful summary and survey of these assertions is found in Michael A. Grisanti, "Recent Developments in Patriarchal Chronology: Key Issues and Overview of the Big Picture" (paper, 71st Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Diego, CA, November 2019).

⁶² Steven Collins, "Tall El-Hammam Is Sodom: Billington's Heshbon Identification Suffers from Numerous Fatal Flaws," *Artifax* 27/3 (Summer 2012); Steven Collins, "Tall el-Hammam Is Still Sodom: Critical Data-Sets Cast Serious Doubt on E.H. Merrill's Chronological Analysis," *Biblical Research Bulletin* 13/1 (2013); Craig Olson, "A Proposal for a Symbolic Interpretation of Patriarchal Lifespans" (PhD Dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2017).

⁶³ House, "Epochal Arrangement," 110.

⁶⁴ James Hoffmeier has adopted this interpretation of Moses's life (see Mark D. Janzen, ed., *Five Views on the Exodus: Historicity, Chronology, and Theological Implications*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology, ed. Stanley N. Gundry [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021]).

⁶⁵ "Hermeneutical Problem," 19.

⁶⁶ Westminster Divines, "Westminster Confession."

⁶⁷ Brian Flamme, "The Sufficiency of Scripture," *Lutheran Reformation: Blog*, August 23, 2017, <https://lutheranreformation.org/theology/the-sufficiency-of-scripture/>.

⁶⁸ Grindheim, "Biblical Authority," 803.

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WILD WEST EVANGELICAL HERMENEUTICS

PART THREE: THE PATRIARCHAL LIFE SPANS

HENRY B. SMITH JR.

“Allowing scientific and historical inquiry to inform our understanding of the Bible is good and necessary. But ultimately we must allow Scripture to reform our scientific and historical conclusions. There is nothing wrong in principle with rethinking a time-honored interpretation of God’s word on the basis of new data. The problem is letting inferences from the data drive us to tenuous arguments. Implausible ad hoc exegesis designed to reconcile the Bible with the claims of modern research does more methodological damage than apologetic good in the long run. It generates harmful hermeneutical habits and instincts whereby the longstanding interpretations of God’s people are questioned more readily than the ephemeral results of the scientific establishment.”¹ —Jeremy Sexton

THE SYNTAX EMPLOYED THROUGHOUT GENESIS 5:3–31 AND 11:10–25

Properly understanding the precise use of the verb יָלַד (*yālad*) throughout Gen 5/11 is crucial to interpreting the two genealogies correctly. *Yālad* means “to bear,” “to bring forth,” “to become the father of,” “to father,” “to give birth to,” or “to beget.”² It describes “the birthing process’ or ‘actual delivery’ of the descendants.”³ Modern OT scholars such as Hamilton, Waltke and O’Connor, Tov, Oswalt, and Young concur with this assessment.⁴ This definition is supported by many passages outside of Gen 5/11, including Genesis 21:2, 21:3, 21:5, 21:7, 21:9; Deuteronomy 4:25; 2 Kings 20:18; and Isaiah 39:7; 45:10; 66:9. In the last five of these verses, *yālad* appears in the Hiphil stem, indicating causative verbal action.⁵ *Yālad* can point to the birth of remote descendants such as grandchildren (Dt 4:25) or to immediate offspring, such as Adam’s son Seth (Gn 5:3). Throughout Gen 5/11, *yālad* appears in the Hiphil stem 55 times.

Van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze indicate that when the Hiphil is employed, “the subject of the stem in the Hiphil causes the object of that verb to act as subject in the idea expressed by the verb.”⁶ Similarly, Waltke and O’Connor observe that “the [direct] object participates in the event expressed by the verbal root.”⁷ In the case of the Hiphil of *yālad*, the named descendant (the direct object) is a participant in the verb’s action—i.e., his own birth. This participation is obvious from the nature of childbirth itself. Waltke and O’Connor further state,

*The Hiphil represents the subject as causing an object to participate indirectly as a second subject in the notion expressed by the verbal root [emphasis mine]. In fact, this notion probably accounts for the Hiphil’s distinctive form. The Hiphil stem’s characteristic h preformative, derived from a third-person personal pronoun, reflects a designation of a second subject’s participation in the action.*⁸

Let us now observe how the Hiphil of *yālad* works in the case of Genesis 5:18–20, where temporal indicators are present. “When Jared had lived 162 years, he caused Enoch to be born. Jared lived 800 years after he caused Enoch to be born, and he caused [other] sons and daughters to be born. Thus all the days of Jared were 962 years, and he died” (my translation). Jared is the subject, who, in the 162nd year of his life, causes Enoch (the direct object) to indirectly participate as a second subject in the notion expressed by the verbal root, *yālad*. Syntactically and logically, Enoch could participate in the event expressed by *yālad* during Jared’s 162nd year *only* if Enoch was in fact born during Jared’s 162nd year. Waltke and O’Connor emphasize that the event expressed by the verbal root (*yālad*) is the event in which the direct object participates—in this instance, his own birth. While other actions could be inferred from any causative act (in the case of the Hiphil of *yālad*, intercourse or even events leading up to intercourse could be logically inferred), no other action is entailed in the verbal root itself. Sexton accurately observes, “Linguists and Hebraists agree that a causative (such as the *hiphil* of יָלַד) describes the caused event [being born], not the causing action [intercourse, etc.], and that a causative’s temporal qualifier [162nd year] thus refers to the time of the caused event [being born], not to the time of the causing action.”⁹ ***The birth of the direct object is the only verbal activity semantically in view.***²

Sexton observes further, “Genesis uses אֶת [’et] with the *qal*, *hiphil*, *niphal*, and *hophal* of יָלַד [*yālad*] to mark the name of the person born.”¹⁰ And ’et is not merely a direct object marker, but also an emphatic particle that stresses the noun—in this case, the named descendant—that follows it. In both Gen 5:18 and 5:19, this untranslatable direct object marker specifies Enoch as the recipient of and indirect participant in the action entailed by the verbal root, *yālad*. No intermediate, unnamed descendant is being referenced (more on this below). *Yālad* cannot refer to an unnamed descendant as its direct object.¹¹ Throughout Gen 5:3–31 and 11:10–25, the time in which the action of the verb *yālad* occurs is strictly limited to the specified year of the progenitor’s life. The immediate context

and syntax place strict limitations on when the action takes place and on who receives the action of the verb. So when was Enoch born? When Jared was 162 years old.

The birth of Enoch in Jared's 162nd year is further demarcated and confirmed by the remaining-year formula that immediately follows: "Jared lived 800 years after he caused Enoch to be born" (Gn 5:19a; my translation). The Hiphil infinitive of *yālad* (אָלַד) is translated as "after he caused [patriarch X] to be born" and appears in 16 instances in Gen 5/11.¹³ It should be repeated here that Enoch, and only Enoch, is the object of Jared's fathering. Enoch indirectly participates as a second subject in the notion expressed by the verbal root. This is only possible if Enoch is being born at this moment in time. Together, Gen 5:18 and 5:19 syntactically limit the birth of Enoch to one chronologically precise year in the context of Jared's life, the 162nd year.

We do not know if Enoch is Jared's immediate son, since no other verses in Scripture tell us about their actual biological relationship. In theory, Enoch could be Jared's great-great-grandson since the Hiphil of *yālad* can point to the birth of a remote descendant as its direct object. This hypothetical scenario would involve three genealogical gaps—i.e., three missing names. Still, however, since Enoch's birth explicitly occurs in the 162nd year of Jared's life (and at no other time), the chronology is fixed—the lives of Enoch and Jared are numerically interlocked with each other. When Jared is 162 years old, Enoch is born, regardless of their biological relationship. Thus, because of the precise way the genealogies in Gen 5:3–31 and 11:10–25 are syntactically constructed, any hypothetical missing names are irrelevant to the question of chronological interpretation and computation. *While genealogical gaps may exist in theory, the syntax eliminates any possibility that chronological gaps exist.*

The "Line of Descent" Eisegesis

To get around the syntactical and grammatical features of Gen 5/11, advocates of a nonchronological interpretation (hereafter NCI) have invented a translation hitherto unknown for the better part of 2,200 years. It has no known precedent in the Bible or in ANE literature.¹⁴ It usually reads something like the following: "When Jared had lived 162 years, *he fathered an unnamed son whose ancestral line eventually led to the birth of Enoch at some unknown later time.*" This "line of descent" interpretation would not allow for the construction of a chronology, since it identifies an anonymous descendant, rather than Enoch, as the one who is born in the 162nd year of Jared's life. Enoch's actual birth would occur later—perhaps even centuries later. This kind of exegetical argument emerged in the 19th century, and permutations of it are legion in the conservative literature.¹⁵

In 1873 Gardiner established his argument for chronological gaps not on the sure foundation of rigorous exegesis, but on the quicksand of paraphrase: "Seth lived 105 years, and begat children, *among whom was Enos; and Seth lived after*

his beginning to beget children 807 years."¹⁶ C. John Collins argues, "When we read that X begat Y, this need only mean that X *became the ancestor of Y.*"¹⁷ Schaeffer claims, "[*Yālad*] can mean, *fathered someone who led to...*"¹⁸ Dyke and Henry use paraphrases such as "the age of the patriarch when *he apparently began reproducing*," "Noah *began a family line which included...*," "Shelah lived thirty years and *began a family line which included Eber*," and "Terah lived seventy years, and *began a family line which included...*"¹⁹ The above italicized words are merely loose paraphrases that then serve as a controlling exegetical and hermeneutical grid for 51 verses of sacred text.

"Line of descent" proponents must also insert another unnamed son into the genealogy each time the infinitive of *yālad* is employed. Thus, Gen 5:19a might read, "Jared lived 800 years after *beginning to father an unnamed son in a line of descendants eventually leading to Enoch.*"²⁰ To maintain this exegesis consistently, a minimum of 26 unnamed, hypothetical descendants must be interpolated into the sacred text from Enosh to Lamech and from Shem to Nahor. But the problems with the "line of descent" eisegesis are far worse even than this. NCI advocates usually argue that vast, unknown periods of time pass between many of the names in Gen 5/11. Hugh Ross once argued that the Flood happened "twenty or thirty thousand years ago."²¹ Millam claims that Gen 5/11 might be stretched to 60,000 years.²² Incredibly, B. B. Warfield asserted that the time gaps in Gen 5/11 could be on the order of 200,000 years,²³ a view more recently championed by Ross and Rana.²⁴

Said interpretations require not just the insertion of two unnamed "sons" per progenitor, but the insertion of dozens or, in some cases, hundreds of them. Borland observes, "It would take a gap of one hundred generations (ten omissions for every listed man) in the Genesis 5 account to move man's history back a mere 16,850 years."²⁵ He further observes that if the genealogical gaps in unrelated genealogies (such as Ruth 4:18–22) can indicate that there are analogous gaps in Gen 5/11, then the primeval history cannot have the kind of massive chronological gaps promoted above. Even if we grant the (erroneous) premise that unrelated genealogies should govern our exegesis of Gen 5/11, the biblical analogy places strict limits on the length of ostensible chronological gaps since the other genealogies are each missing only a handful of names. As Borland notes, "The gap from Kohath to Amram [Ex 6:18–20] is a mere three hundred years, not three thousand or thirty thousand years. Matthew's gap [Mt 1:8, 1:11] is limited to just three kingly generations comprising a total of only seventy years, not seven hundred or seven thousand years."²⁶

Nonchronological interpreters repeatedly deflect attention away from the numbers and syntactical precision in Gen 5/11 by appealing to unrelated genealogies. For example, Collins begins to analyze the Hiphil infinitive of *yālad* in Gen 5:7, but instead of continuing with a careful and thorough exegetical examination, he swiftly jumps to Matthew 1:8 and Exodus 6:16–20 to argue for genealogical, and therefore chronological, gaps in Gen 5/11.²⁷ Dyke and Henry repeatedly deploy the

same exegetical fallacy,²⁸ as do Millam²⁹ and many others.³⁰ White accurately counters: “The proper understanding of the purpose of the numerical data in these two chapters must therefore arise primarily from a consideration of the material in situ rather than from the imposition of principles gleaned from markedly dissimilar genealogies.”³¹

Exegetical fallacy: A faulty method of biblical interpretation. In the case of Genesis 5 and 11, nonchronological interpreters take selected texts such as Genesis 5:32, 11:26; Ruth 4; Matthew 1; etc. and impose their meanings on verses that are markedly different in syntax and structure (Gn 5:3–31 and 11:10–25). This interpretive error may exemplify the fallacy of “illegitimate totality transfer,” described by D. A. Carson (*Exegetical Fallacies* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984], 62).

A parade example of the exegetical fallacy described by White involves Ruth 4:18–22. The verses utilize the Hiphil perfect of *yālad* (“fathered”) with explicitly named descendants designated as direct objects: “Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.” Alone, these verses provide no evidence of immediate sonship or remote descendancy. Once other directly relevant passages are examined (Gn 38:27–30; Nm 14:35, 32:13; 1 Chr 6:33–37), it becomes clear that Ruth 4:18–22 contains some genealogical gaps (missing names). This is an accurate understanding of Ruth 4, but nonchronological interpreters commit a colossal exegetical fallacy when they use the presence of both the Hiphil of *yālad* and genealogical gaps in Ruth 4 to claim that there are chronological gaps in Gen 5/11. Ruth 4 does not even reference the pre-Abrahamic patriarchs, and the existence of genealogical gaps there has nothing to do with possible genealogical gaps in Gen 5/11, much less chronological gaps in the same. Moreover, aside from the use of *yālad* in the Hiphil stem in Ruth (and even then, it is the perfect tense, not the imperfect), Ruth 4, in a number of ways, bears no similarity to Gen 5/11:

1. Gen 1–11 is tightly integrated with Gen 12–50 by use of a *toledot* macrostructure,³² and the genealogies are carefully woven into the context of the entire primeval history. Meanwhile, Ruth 4:18–22 is appended to the end of the chapter (and book).
2. Ruth 4 contains no literary *inclusios* that establish a chronological interpretation (see more below).
3. Ruth 4 contains no numerical data such as begetting ages, remaining years, and life spans.
4. Ruth 4 has no repetition of both the subject and the direct object with the infinitive of *yālad*.

5. Unlike Gen 5/11, Ruth 4 is dependent on passages outside of its immediate literary context when it comes to ascertaining the nature of its genealogical relationships or determining whether a chronology can be constructed.

Ironically, instead of propping up the NCI, Ruth 4:18–22 affirms the fact that the Hiphil of *yālad* cannot semantically point to an unnamed descendant as its direct object.

Chronological *Inclusios*: Adam–Seth–Enosh Methuselah–Lamech–Noah

Strategically placed between Genesis 4 and the Flood narrative, the genealogy of Gen 5 is immediately preceded by two critical verses. Gen 4:16–24 contains a segmented, nonchronological genealogy that outlines the lives of Cain and his descendants after Abel’s murder. Starting in 4:25a, Moses turns back to Adam and Eve: “And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and [she] called his name Seth.” Here, the Qal imperfect of *yālad* (יָלַד) is translated as “bore,” and “she” (Eve) is the subject.³³ Eve’s pronouncement follows: “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him” (4:25b). Seth is unquestionably Adam and Eve’s direct biological son. Gen 4:26a then reads, “To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh.” Here, the passive form of *yālad* (*yullad* [יָלַד]) is used. Three observations are germane to our discussion. First, the passive implies that Seth’s unnamed wife is actively begetting, just like Eve in 4:25. Second, the use of the phrase *gam-hû’* (גַּם-הוּא), literally “also-him” or “him-too,”³⁴ clarifies that Seth *also* has a direct son begotten by his wife. Paraphrasing, “Adam had a son by his wife, and so did Seth.” A wooden translation might read, “To Seth him(self) also a son was born.” “Himself” or “him” would read awkwardly in English. But this is the rigid sense of the phrase, and it is important because of the reemphasis on Seth as the immediate father of Enosh. Third, like Eve (4:25) and Adam (5:3), Seth also names his son, further indicating that Enosh is his immediate offspring. Other examples of the combined use of *gam-hû’* and *yālad* where immediate offspring are in view include Genesis 4:22a,³⁵ 10:21,³⁶ 19:37–38,³⁷ and 22:20b, 24.³⁸

Moses then begins “the book of the generations of Adam” (Gn 5:1), referencing God’s creation of Adam and Eve (Gn 1:26–27). Gen 5:2 recounts that they had been created, blessed, and named by God.³⁹ Then Moses writes, “When Adam had lived 230 years,⁴⁰ he caused [a son]⁴¹ to be born in his own likeness, after his image, and he called his name Seth” (Gn 5:3; my translation). Moses replicates “likeness” (*d’mût*) from Gen 5:1 but now adds “image” (*celem*), no doubt drawn from Gen 1:26a and 1:27.⁴² Adam participates with Eve (4:25) in naming Seth, further confirming that Seth is his immediate son.

The begetting age is an integral part of the formula, initially established here in Gen 5:3. The begetting ages are repeated throughout Gen 5/11 and are essential to constructing a chronology. As with Jared/Enoch above, the Hiphil imperfect

of *yālad* is used to designate Adam's fathering of Seth in his 230th year. It is precisely in this year that Seth is born. Seth is also designated by the direct object marker *ʔet* as the immediate recipient of the action entailed by the verbal root (birth). Gen 5:4a follows with the Hiphil infinitive of *yālad*: "The days of Adam after he brought forth Seth were 700 years" (my translation). Like Enoch, Seth and only Seth is the recipient of the action of the verb and an indirect participant in the verbal action of birth. The verse is chronologically precise—Adam lived for exactly 700 more years after Seth was born in his 230th year.⁴³

Gen 5:6–8 then builds on this chronological foundation: "When Seth had lived 205 years, he caused Enosh to be born. Seth lived after he caused Enosh to be born 707 years and caused [other] sons and daughters to be born. Thus, all the days of Seth were 912 years, and he died" (my translation). As with Gen 5:3–4, the Hiphil imperfect and infinitive of *yālad* and the direct object marker establish that Enosh is born in Seth's 205th year. Genesis 4:26 specifies that Enosh is Seth's immediate son, not a remote descendant. Thus, when Adam is 230 years old, Seth is born. When Seth is 205 years old, Enosh is born. At the time of Enosh's birth, 435 years have passed since Adam's creation (230 + 205). This foundational and interlocking chronology extends across three generations of patriarchs, undermining the NCI position.⁴⁴ Coupled closely with 4:25–26,⁴⁵ verses 5:3–8 establish the hermeneutical foundation for interpreting the rest of the genealogy chronologically.⁴⁶

Let us now shift our attention to the end of the antediluvian era:

When Lamech had lived 182 years, he caused a son to be born and called his name Noah, saying, "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands." Lamech lived after he caused Noah to be born 595 years and caused [other] sons and daughters to be born. Thus, all the days of Lamech were 777 years, and he died. (My translation)

Genesis 5:28–31 contains the same formulaic syntax as 5:3–8. Like Adam, Lamech names his biological son, with the birth of that son occurring in a specified year. Lamech then uniquely includes a prophetic declaration to reveal the significance of Noah's name. This further confirms immediate sonship and Lamech's presence at age 182 at Noah's birth. These naming verses bookend the genealogical record of Adam and his antediluvian descendants, forming a literary framework⁴⁷ with chronological symmetry placed at each end.

Methuselah's Death in the Year of the Flood

According to the NCI premises, we cannot know when Methuselah died in relation to the Flood because we cannot know the gap of time between his begetting of an unnamed descendant in his 187th year and Lamech's later birth. Accordingly, Methuselah could have died thousands of years before the Flood. But when we interpret the text chronologically, Methuselah dies in the very year of the Flood.⁴⁸ If chronological

computation were truly unwarranted, as NCI advocates and nonliteral interpreters insist, then Methuselah's death in the year of the Flood becomes an unbelievable coincidence of the chronological interpretation, a virtual exegetical miracle. To get around this, one might concede that a chronological construction is valid from Methuselah to Lamech to Noah but nowhere else. However, this maneuver requires extreme special pleading. The syntax of these verses (Gn 5:25–31) is identical to that of the previous ones (Gn 5:3–24). The obvious chronological intent of Genesis 5:25–31 resulting in Methuselah's death in the year of the Flood forces NCI and nonliteral proponents into an inexorable exegetical quandary. The only faithful explanation of the syntactical structure and numerical data is that the author of the primeval history provided all the begetting ages, not just Methuselah's and Lamech's, for the purpose of chronological computation.⁴⁹

Review Thus Far

Perhaps at this point the NCI advocate might concede that a chronology exists across Gen 5:3–8 (Adam–Seth–Enosh) and 5:25–31 (Methuselah–Lamech–Noah)⁵⁰ but then will argue that the begetting ages for the patriarchs from Enosh to Enoch (5:9–24) do not yield a chronology. Let us suppose for the moment that this is the case. What kind of different syntactical arrangement might we expect from Moses to indicate that there are unknown chronological gaps running through verses 9 to 24? Perhaps we would see the disappearance of the begetting ages or the years lived after the birth of the named descendant, or the absence of life spans in the formulaic epitaphs, or perhaps a switch from the Hiphil of *yālad* to "sons of" to denote remote ancestral relationships, or the mentioning of wives, or even the insertion of a *waw* disjunctive(s). Or, perhaps we might even observe a change from the Hiphil to another verbal stem, such as the Qal. We must inquire, Is there anything syntactically different in Gen 5:9–24 as compared to 5:3–8 and 5:25–31? *Anything different at all?* The answer is an emphatic **no**. Aside from biographical briefs on Enoch and Noah, there is no syntactical change whatsoever. If presenting a mere nonchronological genealogy from Enosh to Methuselah were the goal of the primeval historian, one must ask why the syntactical arrangement has not been modified one iota to indicate such an important shift in focus and intent. The NCI advocate might appeal to directly relevant passages outside Gen 5 (and 11) to demonstrate how there are chronological gaps between at least some of the patriarchs—except no such appeal is possible.

Thus, Gen 5:3–8 and 5:25–31 together establish an indisputable chronological hermeneutic that must govern our understanding of the rest of Gen 5 (and subsequently Gen 11). These chronological *inclusios* at both the beginning and end of the genealogy were designed by Moses to authenticate chronological computation as legitimate throughout the entire genealogy.

GENESIS 5:32—NOAH AND HIS THREE SONS

And Noah was five hundred years old: and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (KJV)

And Noe was five hundred years of age, and Noe became the father of three sons: Sem, Cham, Iapheth. (LXX)⁵¹

After Noah was 500 years old, Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (ESV)

Noah was 500 years old, and he fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (HCSB)

When Noah was five hundred years old he fathered Shem, Ham and Japheth. (NJB)

To justify the “line of descent” eisegesis, NCI advocates persistently draw on Genesis 5:32 and then use it as a hermeneutic to override the force of the syntax found in Gen 5:3–31 and 11:10–25.⁵² This maneuver constitutes another large-scale exegetical fallacy. Moreover, the NCI arguments frequently fail to carefully engage with the interpretive possibilities and nuances represented by the five translations above. And Gen 5:32 differs radically from the systematic syntactical pattern found throughout verses 3–31:

1. The introductory phrase changes from the formulaic “When patriarch A had lived X years” to “Noah was 500 years old.”⁵³
2. Three sons are mentioned instead of one.
3. There is no mention of the years of life lived by the patriarch after a single descendant is born.
4. The infinitive of *yālad* and the reiteration of the single descendant as the direct object of the patriarch’s fathering action are absent.
5. The “[other] sons and daughters” refrain is absent.
6. The formulaic life span epitaph found throughout 5:3–31 is also absent.
7. Noah’s remaining years are chronologically tethered to the onset of the Flood (see more below), not to the year in which the single, named descendant is born.⁵⁴
8. Lastly, 5:32 is not part of the linear genealogy of 5:3–31. Instead, it is a segmented genealogy consisting of one generation of three sons,⁵⁵ like Gen 6:10.⁵⁶

The translators of the KJV and of the LXX chose the conjunction *and* (καὶ) to connect the two main segments of Gen 5:32.⁵⁷ “And” is grammatically accurate and consistent with other directly relevant verses, but it is a conservative translation choice.⁵⁸ Verse 32 begins with a *waw* consecutive (וַ + a verb), “And Noah was...” (וַיְהִי־נֹחַ). The next phrase begins with another *waw* consecutive, “And Noah begat...” (וַיֹּלֶד נֹחַ). This construction is known as consecutive *wayyiqtol*, which is described by Putnam as follows:

Wayyiqtol (imperfect plus *waw*-consecutive...) is the main verb of narrative, used to list series of events. Events described by consecutive *wayyiqtol* tend to be logically or temporally consecutive....The ו [waw] of *wayyiqtol* represents a wide variety of syntactic relationships between clauses; its translation depends on the content of the clauses which it joins.⁵⁹

While “when” is grammatically possible,⁶⁰ the rendering would make Noah’s sons triplets⁶¹ or otherwise place all their births in Noah’s 500th year.⁶² When we apply the infallible principle of using Scripture to interpret Scripture, the option of “when” is eliminated by directly relevant passages (Gn 7:11, 8:13, 9:24, 9:28–29, 10:21, 11:10) that bring enhanced clarity to our understanding of 5:32.

In Genesis 9:24, Ham is designated as the “youngest” (*qāṭān*) son of Noah (ESV; NIV).⁶³ Williams uses *qāṭān* in 9:24 as an example of the superlative.⁶⁴ Cassuto argues that *qāṭān* “is certainly *the least in years*.”⁶⁵ The author of *Jubilees* (ca. 160 BC) viewed Ham as the youngest (Jub. 7:10),⁶⁶ as did the writer of 4Q252 from Qumran.⁶⁷ The KJV and the LXX render *qāṭān* as “younger,”⁶⁸ but we wonder, younger than whom? Since Ham seeing his father’s nakedness (Gn 9:22) is starkly contrasted with Shem and Japheth together covering Noah in a cooperative act of faithfulness (9:23), Ham is being compared to a single entity, Shem/Japheth. He would therefore be younger than the two. Either translation results in Ham being the youngest son of Noah.

Commentators and translators are divided on the question of whether Shem is the “older brother of Japheth” or the “brother of Japheth the elder” (Gn 10:21). The KJV and NIV designate Japheth as the older son,⁶⁹ while the ESV, the ASV, the NET, and the Vulgate designate Shem as older.⁷⁰ The Greek recensions of two Jewish translators appear to be split—Aquila seemed to view Shem as the oldest, while Symmachus seemed to render Japheth as the “elder.”⁷¹ Concerning the LXX,⁷² Wevers writes that the “genitive τοῦ μεῖζονος makes Japheth the elder brother of Shem. This is also the Masoretes’ understanding of the Hebrew, as the accentuation shows.”⁷³ Since “elder”/“older” (*haggādōl*) appears as the last word in the verse and immediately follows Japheth’s name, it is more likely that it is intended to modify Japheth since Shem appears at the beginning. Of this, Cassuto is certain: “The Hebrew does not mean: the eldest brother of Japheth, but the brother of Japheth, who was the eldest, the firstborn.”⁷⁴

Since Ham is the youngest son but is listed second, and Japheth is the oldest but is listed last, Gen 5:32 cannot be communicating birth order. So why is Shem listed first if he is not the oldest? Ozanne offers one of three viable answers: “The order in Genesis 5:32 is logical rather than chronological, and the names form a chiastic structure, or introversion, in which the first and last names correspond. Hence both Shem and Japheth (Shem above Japheth) were blessed...while Ham, in the person of Canaan his fourth son, was cursed.”⁷⁵ A second



Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library, Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo by Shai Halevi

4Q252 is a Genesis commentary, discovered at Qumran in Cave 4 in 1952 and dated to the last half of the first century BC. This large fragment's first column of text and part of the second column are preserved. The author of this document, by using the phrase "in the 480th year of Noah's life," interprets the 120 years of Genesis 6:3 as the time left before the judgment of the Flood. Noah's 600th and 601st years are explicitly recorded as well. The author of 4Q252 represents one of many pre-20th-century writers who interpreted the Genesis life spans as actual ages.

answer is provided by Sexton, who observes that younger sons in Genesis are often chosen over older sons.⁷⁶ Third, Shem is not the oldest son, but like Abram in Gen 11:26, he is listed first because his line of descent would eventually lead to the Messiah (Lk 3:36–39).

The AMP, NIV, NET, and ESV begin 5:32 with "after."⁷⁷ The standard Hebrew temporal conjunction for "after" (אַחֵר) is absent, but that does not preclude its use if the context merits it. Cryer explains: "Gen 5:32 does not require the translation 'when Noah was....' A sentence begun with a waw-consecutive, an indication of time, and a continuation in waw-consecutive merely implies a loose temporal or logical connexion; accordingly, it would also be correct to translate 'after Noah was 500 years old....'"⁷⁸ Thus, after Noah turned 500, he fathered three sons, the most significant of whom was Shem.

Some writers claim that the chronological imprecision in Gen 5:32 proves that there are chronological gaps in Gen 5/11. This assertion is demonstrably false and exegetically indefensible. Because of the significant syntactical divergence of Gen 5:32 from the previous 29 verses, this verse ought not, and indeed *cannot*, exert hermeneutical control over 5:3–31. Gen 5:32 communicates a temporal progression flowing between 32a, "After Noah was 500 years old," and 32b, "Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth."⁷⁹ (The KJV is adequate but less precise: "And Noah was.... and Noah begat....")⁸⁰ The 500-year referent serves as a chronological signpost in the life of Noah, after which time his three sons are born.⁸¹ Shem's birth year in Noah's life is the only one that can be definitively derived from other verses given in the sacred text by Moses (cf. Gn 11:26).⁸²

Several other verses in Gen 1–11 produce the chronological bridge that extends across the threshold of the two epochs. Gen 11:10b reads, "When Shem was a hundred years old, he caused Arpachshad to be born [Hiphil of *yālad*] two years after the Flood" (my translation).⁸³ Since the Deluge lasted approximately one year, we must determine if the phrase "after the Flood"⁸⁴ is meant to be reckoned from the start or end of it. Other verses bring clarification. Noah died 350 years after the Flood, at the age of 950 (9:28–29). Thus, the time referent that correlates with the phrase "after the Flood" is Noah's 600th year ($950 - 350 = 600$). Gen 7:6⁸⁵ and 7:11 indicate that the Flood *began* in Noah's 600th year, and it ended in his 601st year (8:13). Since Gen 9:28–29 and 7:11 mathematically cohere with Noah's 600th year, the phrase "after the Flood" is to be reckoned from the onset of the Flood, not its end.

We can now determine that Shem was 98 years old when the Flood began ($100 - 2$). Since Noah was 600 at the start of the Flood and Shem was 98, Noah was 502 years old when Shem was born ($600 - 98$).⁸⁶ In combination, the above verses augment and support the above argument that Gen 5:32 does not syntactically require that Shem be born in Noah's 500th year or that he be the oldest son. Japheth was born as the oldest son in Noah's 500th or 501st year, Shem was born in his 502nd, and Ham (the youngest) was born in an unknown year after Shem.⁸⁷

Turning back to 11:10, we see that Arpachshad was born two years after the start of the Flood—i.e., one year after its end. A normal nine-month gestation requires Arpachshad's conception to have occurred approximately three months after the *end* of the Flood. Shem brought no descendants on the

ark, so no one else can be Arpachshad's biological father other than Shem. Noah, Shem, and Arpachshad are definitively the direct sons of their respective preceding progenitors; this further justifies the validity of chronological computation in Gen 5, through the Flood year, and into Gen 11:10–25. The 435-year Adam–Seth–Enosh chronology and the 971-year, five-generation chronology of Methuselah–Lamech–Noah–Shem–Arpachshad bookend the genealogy.⁸⁸

NONLITERAL INTERPRETATIONS PRODUCE EXEGETICAL ABSURDITIES

In parts one and two, we carefully demonstrated how the hermeneutical methods informing nonliteral interpretations of the patriarchal life spans subvert Scripture's self-attesting witness and contradict Jesus's authoritative affirmation of that witness. Here, we will closely examine the exegetical consequences of such methods.

A Farcically Collapsed Chronology

In wide-ranging attempts to reconcile Gen 5/11 with modern-day scientific and archaeological truth claims, 21st-century evangelical scholars have moved in a different direction than the NCI advocates. They claim that the patriarchal numbers do not refer to actual ages at all.⁸⁹ This modern trend involves a variety of clever but ultimately subversive hermeneutical maneuvers. Back to our example of Jared, all nonliteral interpreters would say he did not live to 962 years of age. Instead, if Jared was even a real person at all, he really lived a life span commensurate with modern human beings. The figures of 162, 800, and 962 years are all nonliteral and inherently unclear, as the numbers could have a variety of meanings: mystical, symbolic, honorific, sexagesimal, and so on. It's really anybody's guess.⁹⁰

So Enoch was really born when Jared was a “normal” age of 30 years, give or take. What does this interpretation yield? The time between Jared and Enoch is now reduced from 162 years to 30. Using 30 as an average collapses the pre-Flood era to a mere 300 years. Nonliteral interpreters miss the obvious point that the begetting ages and life spans must be *increased* substantially to correlate the biblical text with external dates. When the actual ages are reduced, the problems are not resolved, but instead are farcically exacerbated. Sexton observes, “To date Adam to ca. 40,000 BC (a recent date by mainstream standards), the average begetting age of the nineteen patriarchs would need to be roughly 2,000 years old. An average begetting age of 1,000 years old (still unreasonably high) would not get us much beyond 20,000 BC.”⁹¹ Thus, correlating the pre-Abrahamic era in the Bible with the conventional evolutionary paradigm's date for man's origin would require raising the average begetting age to at least 25,000 years, with corresponding life spans then exceeding 100,000 years.

Noah's Life: Chronological Gibberish

In the six hundredth year of the life of Noah, on the seventeenth day of the second month; *on that day* all the springs of the great deep split open.... *On that very day*, Noah; and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and the wife of Noah and the three wives of his sons with them went into the ark. —Genesis 7:11, 7:13

And in the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters dried up from upon the earth.... And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was [completely] dry. —Genesis 8:13–14⁹²

As we detailed above, Moses uses exacting and literal chronological precision to integrate Noah's life with the lives of Methuselah, his father Lamech, his son Shem, and his grandson Arpachshad. The same kind of precision continues throughout the entire Flood narrative.⁹³ Keeping these points in mind, let us now consider the above phrases *on that day* (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא)⁹⁴ and *on that very day* (בַּעֲצֻם הַיּוֹם הַהוּא).⁹⁵ Both denote a very specific day, with each phrase equating to the 600th year, 2nd month, and 17th day in Noah's life. The first formulation is similarly employed by the Holy Spirit through Moses in Exodus 19:1: “On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, *on that day* they came into the wilderness of Sinai.” Same genre—narrative. Same chronological precision—“on that day.” Same human author—Moses. Same omnipresent, infallible Holy Spirit speaking in God-breathed Scripture. The second phrase and its usage find an almost exact parallel in Ezekiel 40:1: “In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was struck down, *on that very day*, the hand of the LORD was upon me.” Few evangelical scholars would reject a literal interpretation of Exodus 19:1 or Ezekiel 40:1. But when it comes to Genesis 5:32, 7:11, 8:13, and 9:28–29, evangelical scholars suddenly revert to symbolic interpretations, mystical numbering, mythological borrowing, or ahistorical storytelling. Both “600th” and “601st” are written as inclusive and ordinal numbers. Given their context, they can only be interpreted as referencing the actual age of Noah.

Let us take things a step further and replace Noah's years with various nonliteral interpretations and see what happens: “In the six hundredth [replace with 15 honorific 40-year blocks purportedly derived from ANE cultural practices] year of Noah's life...,” or “In the 15 honorific 40-year blocks purportedly derived from ANE cultural practices, plus one year [= 601st] year of Noah's life...,” or “In the mystical interpretation still unknown to us year of Noah's life...,” or “In the long-extinct Sumerian sexagesimal numbering system year of Noah's life,” or “In the mytho-historical year of mytho-historical Noah's life...”



Noah's sons Shem, Ham and Japheth, James Tissot (1836–1902).

Now, let us do the same with Gen 9:28–29: “After the flood, Noah lived eight honorific 40-year blocks purportedly derived from ANE texts, plus 30 years. All the days of Noah were 23 honorific 40-year blocks purportedly derived from ANE texts, plus 30 years, and he died.” Or, “After the flood, Noah lived a mystical interpretation not yet / not ever to be deciphered years. All the days of Noah were a mystical interpretation not yet / not ever to be deciphered years, and he died.” Or, “After the flood, Noah lived a number of now-extinct Sumerian sexagesimal numbering system years. All the days of Noah were a number of now-extinct Sumerian sexagesimal numbering system years, and he died.” Or, “After the flood, the mytho-historical Noah lived mytho-historical years. All the days of mytho-historical Noah were mytho-historical years, and he died in mytho-history.”

The unintelligible results speak for themselves.

Job

A careful look at the chronology of Job's life supports the previous conclusions. “And after this⁹⁶ Job lived 140 years,⁹⁷ and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. And Job died, an old man, and full of days” (Jb 42:16–17). Before his suffering began, Job had already fathered ten adult children (1:2, 1:4), making him at least 60 years old at that time. He was likely closer to 70. Thus, Job lived at least 200 years. How can literal years (60) be added to symbolic years (140)? (See more on this below.) Given Job's patriarchal setting, his life span is commensurate with his contemporaries (Nahor, 208;⁹⁸ Terah, 205; Abraham, 175; and Isaac, 180). Similar “old age” expressions are ascribed to the 70-year-old David (1 Chr 29:28; 2 Sm 5:4–5; 1 Kgs 1:1), the 80-year-old Barzillai (2 Sm

19:32), and the 98-year-old Eli (1 Sm 4:15, 4:18). None of these three life spans can be interpreted symbolically, and neither can Job's.

“Honorific Narcissism” in the Direct Speech of Jacob, Abraham, and Moses

Unfortunately, some professing evangelical scholars now deny that the life spans of Abraham (175), Isaac (180), Jacob (147), Joseph (110), Joshua (110), and Moses (120) are to be taken as actual ages. Genesis 25:7 indicates that Abraham died at age 175, with verse 8 saying he “breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years.” Steven Collins claims that this number should be interpreted as follows: “The 175 years of Abr(ah)am may be a combination of his actual age (perhaps 55? or 95?) plus two or three 40-year honorific supplements as a result of status-raising accomplishments within his tribal society. If not this, then something else. Perhaps we will never know what the formulas are.”⁹⁹

Collins's dubious interpretation rips Abraham's life span from its literary and canonical context. Patriarchal chronology is derived from forty-plus data points woven into the Genesis narratives for the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.¹⁰⁰ We have several inspired texts guaranteeing an accurate and literal understanding of Abraham's age. When Abram is 99 years old (Gn 17:1), God appears and enacts the covenant of circumcision. Abram, at age 99 (Gn 17:26), and Ishmael, at age 13 (Gn 17:25), are circumcised, and Abram is renamed Abraham. The events occur *that very day* (Gn 17:23, 17:26), the same phrasing used in Gen 7:13 for Noah. Simple math derived from these verses indicates that Abram was 86 years old when Ishmael was born (99 – 13). This mathematical fact is independently confirmed by Abram's begetting age of 86 years explicitly recorded in Genesis 16:16. Moreover, Gen 12:4 indicates that Abram departed for Canaan at the age of 75. Then, “when Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan” (Gn 16:3a), he married Hagar at age 85 (75 + 10). Hagar conceived Ishmael soon thereafter (16:3–5), placing his birth in...*Abram's 86th year*.

According to any symbolic formulation, neither 75 nor 85 nor 86 nor 99 can be Abram's real age. If one claims that Abram's age of 86 is symbolic but agrees that Ishmael's age of 13 is not, then, as with Methuselah, we have a remarkable happenstance of chronological computation—a literal 99 minus a literal 13 yields a literal 86 years. And how remarkable it is that when ten years and one year are added to the putative symbolic 75 (Gn 12:4), Ishmael's birth again falls in...*Abram's 86th year*. If Abram was really some unknown but lesser age (say 35?), how is it possible that subtracting Ishmael's actual 13 years from Abraham's 99 years creates perfect mathematical agreement between 16:16, 17:1, and 17:24–25? And how is it

that the 11 actual years between Gen 12:4 and 16:3 also cohere chronologically with 16:16, 17:1, and 17:24–25? Symbolic advocates would have to insist that all this basic fourth-grade math is merely an illusion.

The symbolic formulation grows even more absurd when it is applied to the dialogue that takes place between Abraham and God in Genesis 17:15–17:

And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, “Shall a child be born **to a man who is a hundred years old**? Shall Sarah, **who is ninety years old**, bear a child?”

Abraham’s incredulity in this personal encounter with God cannot be divorced from the actual ages he explicitly states for himself and Sarah in his direct speech. But let us now imagine God listening to Abraham narcissistically heap honorific formulas *to* and *upon* himself: “Shall a child be born to a man **who is 60 (?) years old plus one honorific block of 40 years based on status-raising accomplishments?**” Even more absurdly, the formulation must also be applied to Sarah. “Shall Sarah, **who is 50 (?) years old plus one honorific block of 40 years based on status-raising accomplishments**, bear a child?” Perfectly in line with a literal, chronological interpretation, and with Abraham’s personal testimony to God about his and Sarah’s actual ages, Genesis 23:1 indicates that Sarah was 127 years old when she died. Abraham would have been ten years older at that time, or 137. How could applying honorific 40-year blocks based on “status-raising accomplishments” to the life span of a woman who held no royal stature even be conceivable within the patriarchal society of Abraham’s day?

Absolute confirmation of Abraham’s literal begetting age of 100 years at Isaac’s birth is found in the apostle Paul’s inspired exposition in Romans. There, Paul explains how Abraham’s faith in God’s promises served as the instrument of his justification: “He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (**since he was about a hundred years old**), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb” (Rom 4:19; cf. Heb 11:11). Now let us substitute the putative status-raising formula into the verse: “He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (**since he was about 100 20 or 40 or perhaps 60 years old plus one or perhaps two honorific blocks of 40 years based on status-raising accomplishments. If not this, then something else. Perhaps I, Paul the Apostle, will never know how old Abraham really was**.)” Beyond producing meaningless gibberish, this purported Bronze Age formulation is also something that would have been completely unknown to Paul and his first-century audience. According to Collins’s construct, the key

to understanding Abraham’s actual age was ostensibly still buried somewhere in the sands of the ancient Near East.

Turning our attention to Jacob, we see that Genesis 47:8–9 reads as follows:

And Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How many are the days of the years of your life?” And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.”

Jacob’s own description of his age synchronizes well with the fact that his four previous fathers (Nahor, 208; Terah, 205; Abraham, 175; and Isaac, 180) all lived several decades longer than he eventually did. Like the case of Abraham’s direct speech, a nonliteral status-raising formulation for Jacob’s own testimony about himself can only be viewed as honorific narcissism. One also wonders how Pharaoh could possibly have understood what Jacob was saying if his life span were not literally 130 years at that moment in time.

Moreover, Jacob’s epitaph indicates that he lived 147 years in all, and that he “lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years” (Gn 47:28). How can symbolic years (130) be added to literal years (17)? Or is this simple math also another illusion? Grudem’s words of warning from Part One are worth repeating here: “Be suspicious of ‘experts’ in some field who attempt to lead you away from what seems to be the plain meaning of the text of Scripture.”¹⁰¹

Some evangelicals are now treating Moses’s life span in the same manner, and the interpretive results are equally preposterous. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5, 6:8, 6:10, 6:15, 7:51, 7:55), Stephen affirms the chronology of Moses’s life deposited in various OT texts, a chronology that can only yield an actual life span of 120 years: “When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel” (Acts 7:23). At age 80: “Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him...in a flame of fire in a bush” (7:30). From age 80 to 120 (Dt 31:2): “[Moses] led them out, performing wonders and signs...in the wilderness for forty years” (Acts 7:36). Any purported connection between Moses’s 120 years of life and symbolic Bronze Age ANE formulations would have been long extinct by the first century, and thus completely unknown to both Stephen and his contemporary fellow believers. Stephen’s audience could never have understood what he was saying about the chronology of Moses’s life unless the numbers were taken as actual years.

The wretched fruit of the Albrightian synthesis (see Part One) rears its hermeneutical head in Hoffmeier’s out-of-hand dismissal of Stephen. He relegates Stephen’s 40-year references in Moses’s life to “rabbinic interpretation.”¹⁰² Never mind the fact that Stephen was speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰³ And never mind Moses’s own testimony: “I have led you *forty years* in the wilderness” (Dt 29:5a). “And

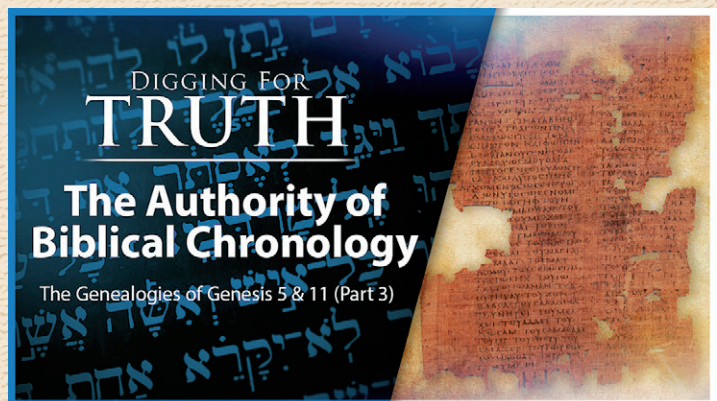
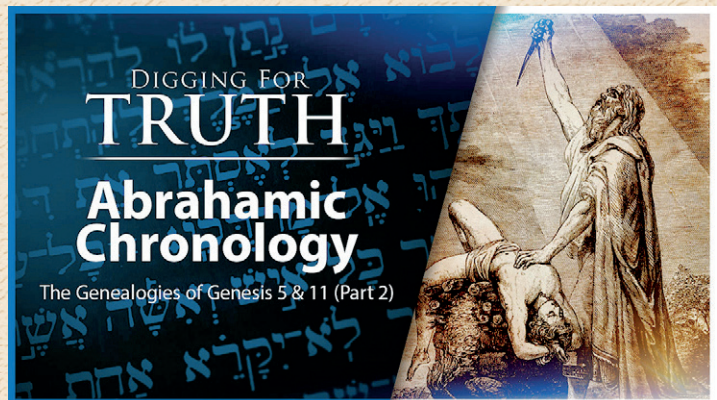
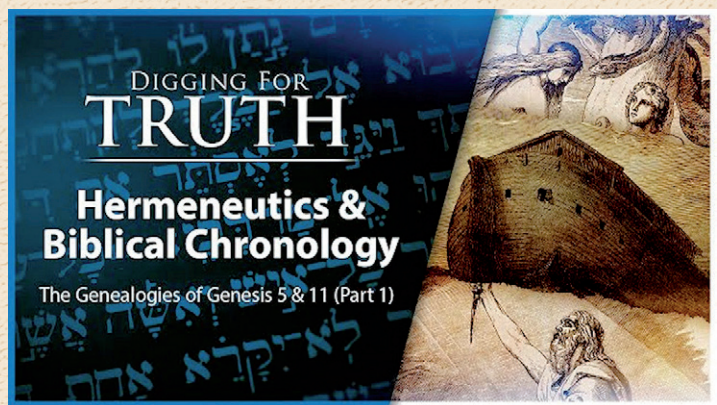
you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these *forty years* in the wilderness....Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these *forty years*" (Dt 8:2, 8:4). Or Yahweh's own words: "Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you *forty years* in the wilderness....Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings during the *forty years* in the wilderness, O house of Israel?" (Am 2:10, 5:25). Apparently, Moses and God Himself were unduly influenced by the rabbis. It's a good thing we have modern evangelical archaeologists around to straighten them both out.

Additional confirmation is found in the chronology of Aaron's life. Exodus 7:7 reads, "Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh."¹⁰⁴ And Numbers 33:38–39 reads, "And Aaron the priest went up Mount Hor at the command of the LORD and died there, **in the fortieth year** after the people of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, **on the first day of the fifth month. And Aaron was 123 years old** when he died on Mount Hor." These verses are situated in the context of Moses briefly recounting Israel's journey from Egypt to the plains of Moab. The parallel itinerary in Exodus consistently references months of the year, affirming that the 40-year referents can only be taken literally¹⁰⁵ (Ex 16:35; Nm 14:33, 14:34, 32:13; Dt 2:7, 8:2, 8:4, 29:5; Jos 5:6; Neh 9:21; Ps 95:10; Am 2:10, 5:25). Moreover, the precise time frame is actually 39 years. "Fortieth" is an ordinal number, and the reckoning is intended to be both literal and inclusive (cf. 1 Kgs 6:1).¹⁰⁶ The chronological precision is like that of Gen 7:11 and 8:13—on the 1st day of the 5th month in the 40th year after the Israelite departure from Egypt, at the age of 123, Aaron dies.

The reinterpreters tell us that 80 years is not really 80 years, and that 120 and 123 years are not really 120 and 123 years. Perhaps the numbers really consist of one or two honorific blocks of 40 years, plus 40 real years, plus 3 real years (for Aaron). Or there is some other, unknown meaning yet to be unearthed. We must pause here momentarily and ask a series of crucial questions. Why is the number three added to the putative symbolic formulation for Aaron? Is the number three also symbolic? If so, what does it mean? If not, how can a real number be added to a symbolic one? And how can Aaron possibly be afforded an honorific number higher than that of Moses, the greatest figure in the OT? Moreover, why do unremarkable patriarchs such as Methuselah (969), Jared (962), Mahalalel (895), Arpachshad (565), Serug (330), and even Amram (137), Levi (137), and Kohath (133) have numbers ascribed to their life spans that are (far) greater than Moses's? Since Moses is the greatest of all the OT prophets, shouldn't his honorific life span exceed even those of Adam (930), Enoch (365), Noah (950), Terah (205), Abraham (175), Isaac (180), and Jacob (147)? And what of the priest Jehoida, who lived to the age of 130 during the reign of Joash in the ninth century BC (2 Chr 24:15)? In the nonliteral world, Moses's life span should instead exceed that of Methuselah and

be expressed as a symbolic and perfectly rounded number like 1,000 years. What better way to bring honor to Moses than to attribute to him the highest life span in all OT revelation? Instead, the biblical author(s) did an abysmal job of honoring him by attributing a paltry 120 years to his life.

Nonliteral interpretive problems do not end with these rhetorical questions. Not long after Aaron's death, Moses directly addresses the men, women, and children of Israel. His speech immediately follows explicit assertions about the inherent clarity of God's words. Deuteronomy 31:1–2 reads, "So Moses continued to speak these words to all Israel. And he said to them, **I am 120 years old today**. I am no longer able to go out and come in. The LORD has said to me, "You shall not go over this Jordan"" (cf. Dt 34:7). This statement agrees with the chronology of Aaron's life outlined above.



See *Digging for Truth* episodes 183, 184, and 185, "The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11," on the ABR YouTube channel.

But let us suppose that Moses's statement about his own age was really an expression of an honorific formula or of some other numerical symbolism. In any symbolic framework, Moses would have cognitively known that he was considerably younger than 120 years old—perhaps only 70 or 80. Yet, instead of plainly stating this, he decided to narcissistically honor himself. (Joshua later did so as well.)¹⁰⁷ This interpretation might look something like the following: “So Moses continued to speak these words to all Israel. And he said to them, ‘I am one or maybe two 40-year blocks of an honorific and/or symbolic formula derived from the practices of pagan ANE cultures old today, plus 40 real years. Perhaps you will never know what my real age is, and neither will I.’”

Now let us also imagine the Israelites in the crowd listening to Moses claim to be 120 years old and then envision them turning to one another and saying, “Well, we all know Moses is really only 80 years old, so he must be expressing his real age in terms of a symbolic and/or honorific formula. So 120 years is really 80 years plus one honorific block of 40 years.” Or maybe others said, “No, Moses is only 70 years old, plus one honorific 40-year block, plus an extra ten years.” Then let us imagine the children asking their fathers, “Why is Moses saying he is 120 years old, Dad?” The father might respond, “It's OK, son. Moses may really be only 70 years old, plus one honorific block of 40 years, plus an extra ten years.” Or, “Son, far in the future, people called ‘archaeologists’ will uncover clay tablets that will explain what Moses really meant. Moses is bringing honor to himself by expressing his age based on motifs from the cultures surrounding us. You know, ideas derived from worldview structures that the LORD God commanded Moses and all of us Israelites to unconditionally repudiate.”

The evangelical symbolic interpreters have tragically lost their way. In the case of Steven Collins, it is the “Tall el-Hammam can never be anything but Sodom” hermeneutic that functions as the *norma normans non normata*. This catechesis has become the absolute hermeneutical ground for interpreting sacred Scripture.¹⁰⁸ While Collins's method is unique in the particulars, it is hardly alone in principle. Wild West hermeneutics have regrettably become normative practice in the evangelical study of the Old Testament.

SUMMARY

Parts one and two of this series primarily focused on the intractable doctrinal and hermeneutical problems with comparative archaeological method and the way it is deployed in modern evangelical OT scholarship.¹⁰⁹ Near the end of part two, we surveyed rationales used to justify evangelical claims that the patriarchal life spans recorded in the Genesis narratives cannot be interpreted as actual ages. Here in part three, we examined the syntax of Genesis 5 and 11, the year of Methuselah's death, the Lamech–Noah–Shem–Arpachshad chronology, and the chronologies and life spans of Abraham, Jacob, and Moses. We concluded that a close examination of the relevant biblical texts reduces nonliteral interpretations of the patriarchal life spans to meaningless incoherence.

There is nothing particularly difficult about interpreting the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 and the numbers embedded in the patriarchal narratives. The Hebrew is relatively simple to understand, and most modern English translations communicate the meaning quite effectively. Our understanding of the patriarchal life spans should not be predicated on unrelated genealogies (whether biblical or extra-biblical), recently invented and dubious semantics of causation, secret mathematical systems, pliable honorific formulas, veiled symbolic meanings, mytho-historical genre designations, ANE archaeological interpretations and mythological texts, or any other hermeneutical constructs invented by the mind of sinful man. Indeed, all Scripture “comes to us from a transcendent personal God” and therefore “dwarfs all human conjecture and renders finite speculation impotent.”¹¹⁰ Like all details in Scripture that challenge our puny and fallen minds, the life spans are to be accepted literally—as actual ages. They are trustworthy and true because they are the very words of God Himself—the Ancient One with infinite knowledge and an infinite mind.

Romans 15:4a reads, “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction.” Paul, in the Spirit, is telling us that God's people in the first century were already able to understand OT revelation, including the patriarchal life spans. The numbers were, and still are, “God-breathed.” In their literary, theological, and canonical context, these numbers were “written for our instruction” by the hand of Moses, also in the Spirit. Paul's first-century audience did not need experts with specialized knowledge in order to understand the numbers as God intended, *and neither do we*.

And so, we end our series where it began, with the penetrating words of Martin Luther.¹¹¹ If you cannot understand how the patriarchs could have lived for many centuries, **“then grant the Holy Spirit the honor of being more learned than you are.”** For you are to deal with Scripture in such a way that you bear in mind that God Himself says what is written. But since God is speaking, it is not fitting for you wantonly to turn His Word in the direction you wish to go.”¹¹²

This article is part of the ongoing Genesis 5 and 11 Genealogy and Chronology Research Project.



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Notes

Jeremy Sexton, "Evangelicalism's Search for Chronological Gaps in Genesis 5 and 11: A Historical, Hermeneutical, and Linguistic Critique," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61, no. 1 (March 2018): 25.

² Jeremy Sexton, "Who Was Born When Enosh Was 90? A Semantic Reevaluation of William Henry Green's Chronological Gaps," *Westminster Theological Journal* 77, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 195.

³ Sexton, 196.

⁴ Sexton, 195–96; Jeremy Sexton and Henry B. Smith Jr., "Primeval Chronology Restored: Revisiting the Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11," *Bible and Spade* 29, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2016): 43.

⁵ Putnam notes that when a verb does not occur in the Qal stem, the Hiphil can function as a simple transitive verb. When a verb occurs in the Qal and Niphal stems, the Hiphil form of the same verb is most often causative. Such is the case here with *yālad*. See Frederic Clarke Putnam, *A New Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 176.

⁶ Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 86.

⁷ Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 435.

⁸ Waltke and O'Connor, 435.

⁹ Jeremy Sexton, "Andrew E. Steinmann's Search for Chronological Gaps in Genesis 5 and 11: A Rejoinder," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61, no. 1 (March 2018): 39. Steinmann would assert that an unspecified triggering action of causation, instead of the actual birth of Enoch, occurred in the 162nd year of Jared's life. Enoch was then born at some later, unknown time (perhaps centuries or even millennia later). This would allow for chronological gaps in Gen 5/11 (Andrew E. Steinmann, "Gaps in the Genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11?," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174 [April–June 2017]: 145–48). Sexton explains:

Steinmann assumes that the semantic focus of יָלַד in the *hiphal* and *hophal* (i.e. in the H-stem) is on the progenitor's causing action rather than the progeny's birth. Consider the impossibility of reconciling this assumption with Gen 40:20; Ezek 16:4, 5. In each of these three verses, the H-stem of יָלַד focuses on "the day" of *birth*. Ezekiel 16:4, 5 refer to "the day on which *you were brought forth* [H-stem of יָלַד]." The temporal qualifier "the day on which" refers to the time of the progeny's birth, not the time of the progenitor's causing action. ("Steinmann's Search," 40 n. 2 [italics and brackets original])

The same critique applies to Gen 5/11, where two temporal qualifiers (begetting age and remaining years) limit the birth of the named descendant to one precise year in the life of the progenitor. For a decisive refutation of Steinmann's eisegesis, see Sexton, "Evangelicalism's Search," 5–25; Sexton,

"Steinmann's Search," 39–45; Sexton, "Who Was Born?," 195–209. Steinmann's case for chronological gaps in Gen 5/11 is ultimately driven by flawed hermeneutics. He openly admits that human interpretations of ANE evidence can exert magisterial control over the sacred text of Scripture. Gen 5/11 must contain gaps, because ANE archaeologists assign dates that conflict with the primeval chronology to archaeological remains (Steinmann, "Gaps in the Genealogies," 141, 154).

¹⁰ Sexton, "Who Was Born?," 197 n. 37.

¹¹ Sexton, 197–201; Sexton, "Evangelicalism's Search"; Sexton, "Steinmann's Search."

¹² Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, revised and expanded by John C. Beckman, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 133, 179.

¹³ Genesis 5:7, 5:10, 5:13, 5:16, 5:19, 5:22, 5:26, 5:30; 11:11, 11:13, 11:15, 11:17, 11:19, 11:21, 11:23, 11:25.

¹⁴ J. Paul Tanner, "The Genealogies of Genesis 5 & 11: Reasons for Understanding These as Gapless Chronologies" (paper, Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Antonio, TX, November 17, 2016), 17.

¹⁵ Just a few examples include the following: Gleason L. Archer Jr., "The Chronology of the Old Testament," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: With the New International Version*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 1 of 12, *Introductory Articles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 361; C. John Collins, "How Old Is the Earth? Anthropomorphic Days in Genesis 1:1-2:3," *Presbyterion* 20, no. 2 (September 1994): 115–16; Frederic Gardiner, "The Chronological Value of the Genealogy in Genesis V," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 30, no. 118 (April 1873): 323–33; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 254; Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 1 (Chicago: InterVarsity, 1967), 82–83; Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and the Old Testament* (London: InterVarsity, 1966), 39; Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 440–41; Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 109; Francis A. Schaeffer, *No Final Conflict* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975), 37–38; Merrill F. Unger, *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1951), 194. Many more could be cited.

¹⁶ Gardiner, "Chronological Value," 325 (italics added).

¹⁷ "How Old Is the Earth?," 115–16 (italics original).

¹⁸ Schaeffer, *No Final Conflict*, 37 (italics added).

¹⁹ Daniel J. Dyke and Hugh Henry, "Genesis 5 and 11 Genealogies in the Context of the Biblical Mindset" (paper, Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Antonio, TX, November 17, 2016), 25, 31, 42, 34 (italics added).

²⁰ Using the abbreviation "PN" to designate unstated personal names inserted between the named patriarchs, Tanner explains further:

If indeed PN₂ really means "*the line that resulted in PN₂*," it still must be true that "PN₁ lived X (number of) years" after "*the*

line that resulted in PN₂.” Using...the example of Mahalalel and Jared, if someone wants to argue that Gen 5:15 means “Mahalalel lived sixty-five years, and became the father of *the line that resulted in Jared*,” then he must also be consistent and say that Gen 5:16 means “Then Mahalalel lived eight hundred and thirty years after he became the father [infinitive of *yālad*] of *the line that resulted in Jared*.” One cannot limit Mahalalel’s 830 years to the first link in the chain; it is the whole chain including Jared. (“Gapless Chronologies,” 18 [italics original])

²¹ Ross, *Genesis Question*, 177.

²² John Millam, “The Genesis Genealogies: Are They Complete?,” Evidence for God from Science, September 3, 2010, <http://www.godandscience.org/youngearth/genesis-genealogies.html>, 21 n. 10.

²³ B. B. Warfield, “The Manner and Time of Man’s Origin,” in *Evolution, Science, and Scripture: Selected Writings*, ed. David N. Livingstone and Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 222.

²⁴ Fazale Rana with Hugh Ross, *Who Was Adam? A Creation Model Approach to the Origin of Humanity*, second expanded ed. (Covina, CA: RTB, 2015), 376.

²⁵ James A. Borland and Duane L. Christensen, “Did People Live to Be Hundreds of Years Old before the Flood?,” in *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions about Creation and the Flood*, ed. Ronald Youngblood (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 178, 182 n. 22.

²⁶ Borland and Christensen, 177.

²⁷ C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 204–206.

²⁸ “Genesis 5 and 11 Genealogies,” 26–29, 52–53. For more, see D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984).

²⁹ “Genesis Genealogies.”

³⁰ See endnote 15.

³¹ Bernard White, “Revisiting Genesis 5 and 11: A Closer Look at the Chronogenealogies,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 53, no. 2 (2015): 257 (emphasis added).

³² Jason S. DeRouchie, “The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the *Toledot* Structure of Genesis,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 2 (June 2013): 219–47.

³³ This same form is also used in Genesis 4:1 (Eve bearing Cain), 4:17 (Cain’s wife bearing Enoch), and 4:20 (Lamech’s wife Adah bearing Jabal). It is also used in Genesis 16:15 in describing Hagar giving birth to Ishmael, as well as in Genesis 21:2, where Sarah gives birth to Isaac.

³⁴ Van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 315.

³⁵ “Zillah also bore Tubal-cain.”

³⁶ “To Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder, [children] were also born” (my translation).

³⁷ “The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore

a son and called his name Ben-ammi. He is the father of the Ammonites to this day.”

³⁸ “‘Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor...’ Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Reumah, bore Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.”

³⁹ Mathews observes that there is an “extended parallelism” between 2:4a and 5:2b and between 2:4b and 5:1a (Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996], 307 n. 36).

⁴⁰ I follow the LXX’s numbers here over the MT’s, based on the work published in the Genesis 5 and 11 Genealogy and Chronology Research Project.

⁴¹ “Son” (בֶּן) does not appear in any of the extant textual traditions preserving Genesis 5:3. However, it can be implied grammatically: “Both the Greek and the Hebrew can be read meaningfully by making ‘Seth’ at the end of the verse do double duty, i.e. modify both ‘called his name’ and ‘begat,’ although admittedly this is an unusual construction” (John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*, Septuagint and Cognate Studies 35 [Atlanta: Scholars, 1993], 69). See also Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, trans. John J. Scullion, from German, Continental Commentary Series (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 346, note to 3a. It is also possible that “son” (בֶּן) dropped out due to scribal error. Wilson notes that it may have been omitted due to homoeoarchton (a scribal error caused by two words or phrases that begin similarly) (Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, Yale Near Eastern Researches 7 [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977], 161 n. 58). Similarly, Ronald S. Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1–11: Textual Studies and Critical Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 49–50, 130.

⁴² “Image” is in parallel with Gen 1:26 (K. Luke, “The Genealogies in Genesis 5,” *Indian Theological Studies* 18, no. 3 [September 1981]: 232).

⁴³ The formula is then completed: “Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died” (Gn 5:5). The epitaph provides further evidence for the legitimacy of chronological computation, as the year of begetting Seth (230) can be added to the years lived after begetting Seth (700) to provide the reader with a chronological cross-check with Adam’s life span (930).

⁴⁴ William Henry Green, for example, asserted that chronological computation does not or cannot extend across three generations of patriarchs in Gen 5 (and 11). See “Primeval Chronology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 47 (April 1890): 297.

⁴⁵ “The language of 4:25–26 is virtually identical to 5:2–3, and taken together they form a chiasmus” (Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 309).

⁴⁶ “The pattern that determines the whole genealogy begins in v. 3” (Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 356).

⁴⁷ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 41.

⁴⁸ The LXX’s numbers for Lamech (188/565/753) place Methuselah’s death six years before the Flood and 2,262 years from Adam. I have concluded that the MT preserves the original

figures for Lamech (182/595/777). This places Methuselah's death in the year of the Flood and 2,256 years from the creation of Adam (instead of the MT's 1,656 years). For more, see Henry B. Smith Jr., "The Case for the Septuagint's Chronology in Genesis 5 and 11," in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference on Creationism, July 29–August 1, 2018*, ed. John H. Whitmore (Pittsburgh, PA: Creation Science Fellowship, 2018), 130.

⁴⁹ Sexton, "Who Was Born?," 204; Sexton and Smith Jr., "Primeval Chronology Restored," 44–45.

⁵⁰ It is compulsory for proponents of chronological gaps, operating on their own exegetical and hermeneutical premises, to explain the incredible phenomenon of Lamech naming Noah and attaching prophetic significance to his name when all the while it is not really Noah who is born in the 182nd year of Lamech's life, but an unnamed son whose ancestral line would eventually lead to Noah at some unknown future date (possibly thousands of years removed from Lamech). For the sake of consistency, the NCI advocate should also apply this exegetical logic to Adam–Seth–Enosh. When one does so, utter nonsense enters the fray. Adam explicitly caused a son to be born, and he called his name Seth (Gn 5:3). But if the object of the Hiphil of *yālad* in the case of Adam is an unnamed son and not Seth, how can Adam give this unnamed son the name of Seth? The same exegetical logic applies to the scenario where Seth explicitly names Enosh. The need for a strained explanation(s) to circumvent the force of the "naming" passages as they are integrated into a formulaic chronological structure raises serious questions about the legitimacy of both the NCI position and its exegetical and hermeneutical method. See similar comments from White, "Revisiting Genesis 5 and 11," 264 n. 32.

⁵¹ Robert J. V. Hiebert, trans., "Genesis," in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 9. The translator of the Greek Genesis from Hebrew added "three sons," a phrase that is absent from the Masoretic Text.

⁵² McFall's absurd exegesis serves as a good example: "When Noah was 500 years old he begat the common ancestor of these descendants. So that Noah carried in his loins Shem, Ham and Japheth, up until he was 500 years old and then they passed out of his physical body in that year" (Leslie McFall, "The Chronology of the Book of Jubilees" [unpublished manuscript, December 31, 2013], Microsoft Word file, 32, <https://lmf12.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/chronology-of-jubilees.pdf>).

⁵³ The Hebrew literally reads, "Noah was a son of 500 years."

⁵⁴ "After the Flood Noah lived 350 years. All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died" (Gn 9:28–29). The (re)appearance of the epitaph here conveys its structural and chronological significance in the broader context of the primeval history. The death notices for Adam and Noah also serve as another literary *inclusio* within the larger framework of Gen 1–11. Noah's epitaph creates a precise and interlocking chronological peg between the end of his life and the year of the Flood.

⁵⁵ DeRouchie, "Blessing-Commission," 237 n. 60. "Linear genealogies take the form: A gave birth to B, who gave birth to

C, who gave birth to D. In contrast, segmented genealogies take the form: A gave birth to B, C, and D; B gave birth to E, F, and G; C gave birth to H, I, and J; D gave birth to K, L, and M" (DeRouchie, 238 n. 61).

⁵⁶ "And Noah caused three sons to be born: Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (my translation).

⁵⁷ "And" also appears in the 1599 Geneva Bible and the Darby translation. Also, Barry Bandstra, *Genesis 1–11: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Hebrew Bible (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 330.

⁵⁸ The CSB, CJB, EHV, HCSB, NASB 1995, and The Living Bible leave the *waw* untranslated. The NASB renders it "Now after Noah..."

⁵⁹ Frederic Clarke Putnam, *Hebrew Bible Insert: A Student's Guide to the Syntax of Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed. (Ridley Park, PA: Stylus, 2002), 31.

⁶⁰ "When" is used by the CEB, The Message, and Wycliffe's translation. Sarna uses "when" but provides no analysis (*Genesis*, 44). Similarly, Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 346.

⁶¹ This view is held by Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1–11*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary: New English Bible (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 60, 63; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 250; Thomas D. Ice and James J. Scofield Johnson, "Using Scriptural Data to Calculate a Range-Qualified Chronology from Adam to Abraham, with Comments on Why the 'Open'-or-'Closed' Genealogy Question Is Chronometrically Irrelevant" (paper, Southwest Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Criswell College, Dallas, TX, March 1, 2002), 17–19. Davidson, for one, provides no rationale for choosing "when."

⁶² The other scenario would involve twins being born at the very start of Noah's 500th year, with the third son's birth being just prior to Noah's 501st birthday. This would be theoretically possible if "when" were an accurate translation.

⁶³ In an almost bizarre polemic, Johnson and Ice ("Using Scriptural Data," 17–19) claim that Gen 9:24 is not referring to Ham at all since he is not referenced in verses 24 to 27. They ignore the explicit mention of his name in 9:22 ("And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside"). They also insist that the order of the names in 5:32 (Shem, Ham, Japheth) must necessarily be the birth order. Thus, the youngest son cannot be Ham, but is Japheth instead. They also infer that anyone who believes otherwise does not believe what God has said. They should take up their argument with Moses, who, in the Table of Nations, first orders the sons "Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (10:1) and then delineates Japheth's descendants first, then Ham's, then Shem's (10:2, 10:6, 10:21). The inspired author of 1 Chronicles also uses this second ordering.

⁶⁴ *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 33–34. See also Frederick H. Cryer, "The Interrelationships of Gen 5,32; 11,10–11 and the Chronology of the Flood (Gen 6–9)," *Biblica* 66, no. 2 (1985): 247; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 319. See also Genesis 42:13, 42:15, 42:20, 42:34.

⁶⁵ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams, from Hebrew, vol. 2 of 2, *Part Two: From Noah to Abraham; A Commentary on Genesis VI9–XI32* (Jerusalem: Varda Books, 2012), 163–65 (italics original).

⁶⁶ James C. VanderKam, *Jubilees: A Commentary on the Book of Jubilees*, ed. Sidnie White Crawford, vol. 1 of 2, *Chapters 1–21*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018), 330, 338–39.

⁶⁷ Timothy Lim, “The Chronology of the Flood Story in a Qumran Text (4Q252),” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 43, no. 2 (1992): 291. In agreement is Genesis Rabbah 36:7 (H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah*, vols. 1–2 of 10, *Genesis: In Two Volumes*, trans. H. Freedman [London: Soncino, 1939], 1:292).

⁶⁸ The LXX uses the comparative, “younger” (νεώτερος). See Wevers, *Notes*, 124.

⁶⁹ Cf. John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Company, 1998), 107; Sexton, “Who Was Born?,” 209 n. 90; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 458; Genesis Rabbah 37:7 (Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 1:299).

⁷⁰ Cf. Cryer, “Interrelationships,” 247.

⁷¹ Wevers, *Notes*, 140 n. 40. The Hebrew (הַגְדֹּל) was rendered by Aquila in the dative case as τῷ μεγάλῳ (lit. “great”), likely modifying Shem. Symmachus rendered it as τοῦ πρεσβυτέρου (lit. “elder”), likely modifying Japheth.

⁷² Merrill asserts that the LXX translators “altered” Gen 10:21 but provides no evidence for the claim (Eugene H. Merrill, “Chronology,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003], 116).

⁷³ *Notes*, 140. Since Shem’s name in Greek appears in the dative case and not the genitive, “elder” is modifying Japheth.

⁷⁴ Cassuto, *Book of Genesis*, 2:218.

⁷⁵ C. G. Ozanne, *The First 7000 Years: A Study in Bible Chronology* (New York: Exposition, 1970), 16.

⁷⁶ “That [Shem] is not named first is a literary move in keeping with the theology of Genesis, wherein younger brothers (e.g., Seth, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Joseph, Perez, and Ephraim) often replace, or are chosen over, their older brothers. It is therefore fitting that Shem and Abram, listed first because of their theological significance, are younger brothers” (“Who Was Born?,” 209). Also, Sexton, “Evangelicalism’s Search,” 6 n. 8.

⁷⁷ “After” also appears in the CEV, ERV, GNT, ISV, NLT, NRSV, and RSV. See also Donald E. Gowan, *From Eden to Babel: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 1–11*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 81; John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed., vol. 1 of 13, *Genesis–Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 108–109.

⁷⁸ Cryer, “Interrelationships,” 247–48 (italics original). Wilson adds, “The temporal clause is formed by simple juxtaposition and so contains no explicit indication of the temporal sequence involved. The translation ‘after Noah was 500 years old’ would also be possible” (*Genealogy and History*, 160 n. 60).

⁷⁹ This progression is quite common with consecutive *wayyiqtol*. See Van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 165–66.

⁸⁰ Cf. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams, from Hebrew, vol. 1 of 2, *Part One: From Adam to Noah; A Commentary on Genesis I–VI 8* (Jerusalem: Varda Books, 2012), 290. Cassuto asserts that Japheth was born in Noah’s 500th year since he is the oldest son (1:290), but 5:32 does not require this interpretation. If one insists that a son be born in Noah’s 500th year, that son can only be Japheth. But in my thinking, Japheth could have been born when Noah was 501 years old. If one insists that Shem is the eldest son of Noah, then Japheth could have been born in Noah’s 503rd year, or thereafter. All these options remain reasonably faithful to the text and do not negate a chronological interpretation of Gen 5/11.

⁸¹ The Flood narrative and other texts restrict Noah’s begetting ages for Japheth and Ham. Since Shem was born when Noah was 502 years old, Japheth must have been born sometime after Noah’s 500th birthday but at least nine months prior to Shem’s birth (assuming Japheth is the eldest). Ham was born after Shem, but he was old enough to have a wife on the day he entered the ark (Gn 7:13)—the 600th year, 2nd month, and 17th day of Noah’s life (Gn 7:11). While it is possible that Ham was several decades younger than his brothers (born, say, when Noah was 550 years old), the three sons likely were clustered closer together in age.

⁸² In the case of Gen 11:26, only Terah’s age at Abram’s birth (130) can be determined. Nahor or Haran was born when Terah was 70. Since Haran died in Ur (11:28) and Nahor married Haran’s daughter Milcah (11:29), Haran was most likely the oldest son of the three, probably born during Terah’s 70th year. This would follow the pattern in Gen 5:32 where the chosen son is listed first (Shem/Abram) and the oldest son is listed last (Japheth/Haran). For more, see my commentary in Henry B. Smith Jr., “From Adam to Abraham: The Latest on the Genesis 5 and 11 Project,” Associates for Biblical Research, January 14, 2021, <https://biblearchaeology.org/research/topics/biblical-chronologies>.

⁸³ The Hebrew literally reads, “Shem [was] a son of 100 years.”

⁸⁴ The exact same phrase, “after the Flood” (אַחֲרֵי הַמָּבּוּל), also appears in Genesis 9:28, 10:1, and 10:32. The LXX reads μετὰ τὸν κατακλυσμὸν.

⁸⁵ “Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth.”

⁸⁶ Dyke and Henry establish the precision of the biblical texts placing Shem’s birth in Noah’s 502nd year and then in the same breath deny the validity of chronological computation. They claim that “the numerical data surrounding Noah and Shem do not refer to the time of the birth of Shem” (“Genesis 5 and 11 Genealogies,” 34). They further posit that Shem may not have been Noah’s son (34), contra Genesis 7:7, 7:13, 9:18, 10:1–2, 10:32; 2 Peter 2:5. Noah’s three sons and their three wives entered the ark with Noah and his wife. To my knowledge, no credible author in the history of the Church or ancient Judaism

has ever doubted that Shem, Ham, and Japheth were the immediate sons of Noah. Dyke and Henry also elide Ham and Japheth when discussing Gen 5:32, then argue that since *yālad* is not pointing to Shem's birth in Noah's 500th year (this premise is correct), it may, when used in other instances in Gen 5/11, be referring to an unknown descendant rather than the direct object (30–31). But as we have shown, the 500-year referent in 5:32 is not pointing to anyone's birth in that year, and 5:32 differs markedly from the rest of Gen 5/11.

⁸⁷ Many writers claim that 11:10 does not reconcile with the rest of Gen 5/11 and the Flood narrative. Mathews translates 5:32 as "After Noah was 500 years old..." but later, in his discussion on 11:10, contradicts his own interpretation of 5:32, stating that it better reads "When Noah..." or "Noah was 500 years old when he fathered..." By doing this, he unnecessarily puts the two passages in conflict with each other (*Genesis 1–11:26*, 319, 492–93, 493 n. 14). Jeremy Hughes argues that Genesis 11:10 is a "secondary addition" (*Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 66 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, an imprint of Sheffield Academic Press, 1990], 18). Gerhard Larsson calls it a "puzzling inconsistency" ("The Chronology of the Pentateuch: A Comparison of the MT and LXX," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102, no. 3 [September 1983]: 405). Similarly, Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 561–62.

⁸⁸ Starting with Lamech's birth when Methuselah is 187 years old, we then add 182 (Noah's birth), 502 (Shem's birth), and 100 (Arpachshad's birth) to get 971 years.

⁸⁹ Henry B. Smith Jr., "Wild West Evangelical Hermeneutics, Part Two: Jesus Christ and the Supreme Authority of Scripture," *Bible and Spade* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2021): 31–32.

⁹⁰ For example, Christensen claims, "It is probably not possible to recover the key to the theological meaning of the numbers and ages in Genesis 5 and 11, at least in detail" (Borland and Christensen, "Hundreds of Years Old?," 180). One ought to weigh Christensen's dubious statement against the witness about Scripture's inherent clarity that we have from Jesus and from Scripture itself. See Henry B. Smith Jr., "Wild West Evangelical Hermeneutics, Part One: The Failure of the Comparative Archaeological Method," *Bible and Spade* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2021): 25–27.

⁹¹ "Who Was Born?," 209.

⁹² For both of these passages, I am largely following the translation of Lee A. Anderson Jr., "Sounding the Structural Depths: Theme Tracing and the Segmentation of the Narrative," in *Grappling with the Chronology of the Genesis Flood: Navigating the Flow of Time in Biblical Narrative*, ed. Steven W. Boyd and Andrew A. Snelling (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2014), 684, 686, 693.

⁹³ For an exhaustive discussion and analysis, see Boyd and Snelling, *Grappling with the Chronology*.

⁹⁴ This expression is also employed in Leviticus 8:34, 16:30; Joshua 7:25; and 1 Samuel 11:13.

⁹⁵ The same exact phrase is also found in Genesis 17:23, 17:26; Exodus 12:17, 12:41, 12:51; Leviticus 23:21, 23:28–30;

Deuteronomy 32:48; Joshua 5:11; and Ezekiel 24:2.

⁹⁶ The Hebrew uses the standard adverb and pronoun (אַחֲרֵי־זֶה) for this expression ("after this"). "This" refers to everything that had happened previously in the narrative of Job.

⁹⁷ The Greek translation reads, "Now Job lived after his calamity one hundred and seventy years, and all the years he lived were two hundred and forty-eight years" (Claude E. Cox, trans., "Job," in Pietersma and Wright, *New English Translation of the Septuagint*, 696). This reading is likely secondary.

⁹⁸ Nahor's original life span is based on readings preserved in the LXX (79 plus 129). See Smith Jr., "Case for the Septuagint's Chronology," 127–28, 131.

⁹⁹ "Tall el-Hammam Is Still Sodom: Critical Data-Sets Cast Serious Doubt on E.H. Merrill's Chronological Analysis," *Biblical Research Bulletin* 13, no. 1 (2013): 23.

¹⁰⁰ Space limitations prohibit a fuller chronological exposition. For more, see Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2011), 72–80; Eugene H. Merrill, "Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 547 (July 1980): 241–51.

¹⁰¹ Wayne Grudem, "The Perspicuity of Scripture," *Themelios* 34, no. 3 (2009): 307.

¹⁰² James K. Hoffmeier, response to "The Fifteenth-Century (Early-Date) Exodus View," by Scott Stripling, in *Five Views on the Exodus: Historicity, Chronology, and Theological Implications*, ed. Mark D. Janzen, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 54–56.

¹⁰³ See also Paul's speech in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:18).

¹⁰⁴ The Hebrew literally reads, "a son of 80 years," and, "a son of 3 and 80 years."

¹⁰⁵ Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 81–86.

¹⁰⁶ See my commentary in "Wild West Evangelical Hermeneutics, Part One," 23–25.

¹⁰⁷ A glance at Joshua's words about the chronology of his own life also cannot cohere with symbolic interpretations: "I was **forty years old** when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land....And now, behold, the LORD has kept me alive, just as he said, **these forty-five years** since the time that the LORD spoke this word to Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness. And now, behold, **I am this day eighty-five years old**" (Jos 14:7a, 14:10). Note that the chronological referent of 45 years does not apply to Joshua's age, but to the time elapsed since the spies went into Canaan. And it coheres with the chronology of Moses's life. Again, a nonliteral interpretation would turn Joshua's words into gibberish.

¹⁰⁸ Collins asserts,

If Tall el-Hammam is biblical Sodom—based on the volume of evidence I see no way around this implication—then the date of its terminal Bronze Age destruction provides us with a *chronological peg* by which an archaeologically and historically reasonable date for the career of Abr(ah)am can be fixed. Such an anchor-point may also provide *hermeneutical grounds* for either accepting or rejecting the traditional notion that the

patriarchal lifespan numbers are to be understood as base-10, arithmetic values, or something else altogether. (“Tall el-Hammam Is *Still* Sodom,” 4 [italics added])

If one concedes for the sake of argument that Tall el-Hammam does fit the geographical requirements for Sodom (a hotly disputed but still-open question), Collins and his archaeological team should be looking for a significant destruction from around 2100 BC (or ca. 1900 BC if one follows the short sojourn). The reported Middle Bronze destruction at Hammam (ca. 1600–1550 BC) has nothing whatsoever to do with the account in Genesis 18–19. Of this we can be certain because the biblical text’s absolute authority as the Word of the infinite, eternal, living God decisively testifies against Collins’s dating scheme. It would indeed be tragic if it turned out that Hammam really was Sodom, but that the correct time period for its destruction was overlooked/ignored because of an indefatigable and dogmatic adherence to an erroneous, incoherent, and ultimately subversive interpretation of the patriarchal life spans.

¹⁰⁹ Smith Jr., “Wild West Evangelical Hermeneutics, Part One,” 22–28; Smith Jr., “Wild West Evangelical Hermeneutics, Part Two,” 25–32.

¹¹⁰ R. C. Sproul, “What Inerrancy Is All About: The Truth of Scripture Demolishes Speculation,” *Moody Monthly* 80, no. 5 (January 1980), 13, quoted in Stephen J. Nichols, *R. C. Sproul: A Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 134.

¹¹¹ See this series’ unofficial preface: Henry B. Smith Jr., “By Whose Authority?,” *Bible and Spade* 33, no. 4 (Fall 2020): 11.

¹¹² Ewald M. Plass, comp., *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, vol. 3, *Prayers to Zeal* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1959), 1523.

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