

A NEW LOOK AT THE GENESIS 5 AND 11 FLUIDITY PROBLEM¹

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Introduction

Since the nineteenth century, OT scholars have generally expressed the opinion that the genealogies in Gen 5 and 11 contain generational and chronological gaps and thus cannot be used, as James Ussher did, for chronological purposes. Most of these scholars believe that genealogies experience fluidity over time; that is, names are often added, omitted, or changed in form. Since the earth is older than Ussher thought, they say, names must have been omitted from the Gen 5 and 11 lists as they were handed down from generation to generation. Thus, in their view, these genealogies do not contradict the generally accepted and quite old dates for the age of the earth and humankind.

Such a view, however, is troubling to some scholars, mostly young-earth creationists, who insist that Gen 5 and 11 clearly present a continuous and no-gap genealogy and chronology from Adam to Abraham. These texts, they argue, are worded in such a way as to exclude omissions and gaps. To suggest omissions and gaps is, in their view, a violation of a straightforward reading of the passages.

If compelling evidence makes it clear that fluidity has occurred in the early Genesis genealogies, then the young-earth position will be damaged. On the other hand, if no compelling evidence exists, the young-earth position will be strengthened and young-earth creationists might justifiably call for OT scholars to reevaluate the chronological value of Gen 5 and 11. Because of the continuing debate and the diffused nature of the evidence, a new look at the Gen 5 and 11 fluidity problem is in order. The new look set forth in this paper is organized in such a way as to answer the question: Did fluidity, for the purpose of compression, symmetry, or any other reason, occur during the transmission of the genealogies in Gen 5 and 11?

The word “fluidity” as used in this study refers to the practice of omitting names from or adding names to a genealogy, or to the practice of

¹This paper was presented at the Evangelical Theological Society in Atlanta, Georgia, 2003.

changing the spelling of names. When omissions are made, fluidity results in compression; that is, a shortened list. Sometimes omissions result in symmetry; that is, an equal number of names in each section of a divided genealogy. The terms "chronological genealogy" and "nonchronological genealogy" are used to describe the genre of the genealogies.

The Nonchronological Genealogy View

A number of modern theologians think the Gen 5 genealogy is not an accurate historical record, but the result of an ancient Mesopotamian list of legendary heroes (either a king list, sage list, hero list, or a list of tribal ancestors) that has experienced so much fluidity during the long process of transmission from one generation to the next that most or all of its historical and chronological value, if it ever had any, has been lost. They express similar views concerning the Gen 11 genealogy. For these scholars, the early Genesis genealogies, if they ever were genealogies, are discontinuous; that is, they contain generational omissions or gaps.

Claus Westermann argues that the ten names listed in Gen 5 were derived from an ancient tribal oral tradition regarding primeval ancestors.² Early in its history this tradition was divided into different segments, which were handed down independently. Westermann locates one segment, or partial segment, in Gen 4:25-26 (Adam, Seth, Enosh) and another in 4:17-18 (Cain, Enoch, Irad, Mehujael, Methushael, Lamech) as employed by the Yahwist (J). He thinks these two segments were also used by the priestly author (P) of Gen 5; thus the names of Gen 4 and 5 were originally the same. He also believes that fluidity during transmission of the segments accounts for the differences between Gen 4 and 5 concerning the spelling of names (Cain/Kenan, Mahujael/Mahalalel, Irad/Jared, Methushael/Methuselah) and the order of names (Cain, Enoch, Irad, Mehujael/Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch). Westermann also argues that P compressed the list of names available to him to ten because this number was "typical and normal for genealogies" in the Ancient Near East.³

Jewish theologian Nahum M. Sarna also sees the ten names in Gen 5 as a result of compression.⁴ He points to several other ten-

²Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-15: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 348-354. Westermann denies any connection between Mesopotamian king lists and the ancestor names in Gen 5.

³Ibid., 352. Westermann credits Abraham Malamat with demonstrating the common use of a ten-name pattern in ancient genealogies ("King Lists of the Old Babylonian Period and Biblical Genealogies," *JAO* 88 (1968): 163-173).

⁴Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (New York: Jewish Publication

name lists (Berossus's list of pre-flood kings, David's genealogy from Perez in Ruth 4:18-22 and 1 Chron 2:5, 9-15, and Abraham's genealogy from Seth in Gen 11:10-26) in ancient records to show that ten-generation genealogies in the biblical world were both artificial and standard. On this basis, he says the "conclusion is unmistakable: we have here [in Gen 5] a deliberate, symmetrical schematization of history."⁵

Gerhard von Rad says the two genealogies in Gen 4 and 5 "obviously [came from] one and the same list."⁶ The similarity of names provides his evidence. Fluidity accounts for the different order of names and spelling of names. He thinks the list from which the biblical genealogies came probably was a descendant of the Babylonian tradition of ten mythical antediluvian kings, although the Hebrew versions cast the men as patriarchs. Thus when von Rad calls attention to the "effort of [chapter] 5 to arrange the ages of man and the world,"⁷ he does not mean that this text reveals their actual ages. The mythical origin and fluid transmission of the text militate against any such literal interpretation. He simply means the Genesis author provides a fabricated linear view of history in order to challenge the cyclic view of history advocated by many ancient pagan religions.⁸

E. A. Speiser sees similarity between the list of names in Gen 4 and 5 and surmises these two lists descended from a common Mesopotamian source. He points to the Sumerian tradition of ten antediluvian kings as the probable source and suggests it was "modified" during transmission to such an extent that the original names were completely replaced by new ones.⁹

John C. Gibson, likewise, points to ancient tradition as the common source of the Gen 4 and 5 genealogies. He suggests that the number of names in Gen 5 probably reflects the number of pre-flood kings in the Sumerian tradition.¹⁰ Concerning the names in Gen 4 and 5, Gibson points out that

The ancient heroes of Hebrew legend are brought together, presented

Society, 1989), 40-41.

⁵Ibid., 40.

⁶Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 69.

⁷Ibid., 66.

⁸Ibid., 66-69.

⁹E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 41-42.

¹⁰John C. Gibson, *Genesis*, Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 1:155-156.

as related to each other, and little notes are added to identify the fuller stories. The Hebrew lists probably serve as an aid to the memory of Israel's story-tellers or "singers-of-*tales*." Behind them lies an old Hebrew epic cycle which reflected the views of the early Hebrews on the beginning of the world and rise of civilization.¹¹

In Gibson's view, the men of Gen 5 probably were not directly related to each other. Their names were simply added to a storyteller's list as the Hebrew epic cycle developed.

Jack Sasson also assumes a common *vorlage* behind the Cainite genealogy of Gen 4 and the Sethite genealogy of Gen 5. Sasson further maintains the Hebrews often moved an important figure to the fifth and/or seventh position in a genealogy as a way of emphasizing his importance. He notes, for example, that in the Genesis genealogies Enoch is seventh from Adam, Eber is seventh from Enoch, and Abraham seventh from Eber. For Sasson, examples like this constitute proof of fluidity and, therefore, rule out the possibility of drawing an accurate chronology from Gen 5 and 11.¹²

Robert Davidson writes that the ten-name list in Gen 5 is reminiscent of Mesopotamian king lists, thus implying the dependence of the former on the latter for its names and its ten-member form.¹³ He notes further that in Babylonian tradition, Enmeduranna King of Sippar was the seventh king, just as Enoch, whose name is similar at its beginning, was seventh from Adam. Seven was considered a sacred number. Shamash had a special fondness for Enmeduranna and blessed him by revealing the secrets of heaven and earth to him, just as the Hebrew deity had a special love for Enoch and blessed him by taking him to heaven. Enoch may have passed from the earth after 365 years, a number which may have been associated with the sun-god.¹⁴ Davidson's points are clear. First, the story of Enoch is dependent on the story of Enmeduranna. Second, the seventh position in ancient genealogies was reserved for outstanding characters, which often involved moving a name from its actual position or from a position completely outside the genealogy at hand to the seventh position. Thus fluidity played a major role in the formation of Gen 5. Omissions were made to achieve the standard ten-name form and names were moved for theological purposes.

¹¹Ibid., 156.

¹²Jack Sasson, "A Genealogical Convention in Biblical Chronography?" *ZAW* 90 (1978): 171-177.

¹³Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1-11*, CBC (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 61.

¹⁴Ibid., 61-62.

Another group of present-day theologians (consisting mostly of evangelicals) argues that the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 are accurate historical records, but that a certain number of names have been omitted from the list. Thus they disagree with the theologians just discussed concerning the historicity of Gen 5 and 11, but agree with them concerning the presence of gaps in the genealogies due to fluidity.

Gleason Archer thinks the fact that both Gen 5 and 11 record exactly ten generations indicates names have been omitted so the list will fit a predetermined symmetrical scheme. He points to Matt 1 as an example of another genealogy in which names are omitted for the sake of symmetry, probably as a memory aid. While granting the existence of omissions in the Genesis genealogies, Archer insists there must be fewer omissions than names listed. In support of this contention, he notes that other long genealogical lists in the Bible never drop more names than they employ. Matthew, for example, lists at least eight ancestors for Jesus for each one he omits. On this same basis, Archer contends humankind could not have been anywhere near 200,000 years old, as some evangelicals propose, for such an age would mean that an unacceptably large number of Adam's ancestors had been dropped from the Genesis genealogies.¹⁵

K. A. Kitchen gives three reasons for doubting that Gen 5 and 11 present continuous lists of descendants.¹⁶ First, certain archaeological evidence places literate civilization in Egypt around 3000 B.C. and quite a bit earlier in Mesopotamia,¹⁷ dates which conflict with a "continuous" reading of Gen 5 and 11. Second, the word "begat" can refer to a descendant rather than a son. Third, the symmetry of ten names in both lists testifies to schematization.

Gordon Wenham denies the dependence of the Sethite genealogy on either the Cainite genealogy or a Sumerian king list, but embraces the idea of generational and historical gaps in Gen 5.¹⁸ Although he says emphatically that "the Hebrew gives no hint that there were large gaps between father and son in this genealogy," "archaeological discoveries" and "historical problems" compel him to accept them, thus placing Adam in "very distant times."¹⁹

¹⁵Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 209-212.

¹⁶K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Chicago: InterVarsity, 1966), 35-39.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 37. Kitchen acknowledges that archaeologists depend heavily upon carbon-14 dating methods for these dates. Radiometric dating methods have been strongly challenged in numerous recent scientific works.

¹⁸Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1987), 123-134.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 133-134.

Derek Kidner suggests the names in Gen 5 and 11 are historical persons, selected as separate landmarks rather than continuous links. He finds examples of this practice in Matt 1 and in the genealogical record of modern Arab tribes. The fact that the Gen 5 and 11 author does not total his numbers or give the impression that the lives of the patriarchs greatly overlapped each other leads Kidner to doubt that the genealogies could be continuous. Archaeological evidences, which he does not spell out, which "prove" civilization dates to at least 7000 B.C., magnify his doubts.²⁰

J. J. Davis thinks the differences between the genealogies of Gen 4 and 5 far outweigh the similarities, so the names in Gen 5 are real people, not creations based on the names in Gen 4.²¹ He believes Gen 5 and 11 mention only key antediluvian figures, not every generation, on several grounds. First, no numerical summation appears at the end of either list. Second, Scripture nowhere totals the years of either list. Third, numbers are included which have little to do with chronology. Fourth, Luke 3:36 lists a man named Cainan as the son of Arphaxad, but Gen 11 omits him. Fifth, on a literal reading of the text of Gen 11, Shem outlives Abraham. Sixth, archaeological calculations based on stratigraphy, pottery typology, and carbon-14 readings show that postflood human cultures appeared around 12,000 B.C., thus placing the flood around 18,000 B.C. Seventh, the lists bear the marks of schematic arrangement. Davis thus suspects "considerable" gaps in Gen 5 and 11, but he suggests that these gaps cannot be nearly large enough to accommodate the "extravagant estimates" of the age of humankind and the earth proposed by evolutionist geologists.²²

Victor P. Hamilton argues that the names of Cain's descendants vary so much from Seth's in both order and spelling that the former evidently had nothing to do with the construction of the latter; that is, they had separate sources. Neither is the Sethite line connected to any Sumerian list of pre-flood kings, since the genres differ. Seth's line forms a genealogy, whereas the Sumerian line forms a king list. Hamilton thus sees no reason to doubt that Gen 5 and 11 recall actual historical men who descended from Seth and later Shem.²³ He doubts, however, that Gen 5 and 11 record every generation. Expressing the thoughts of many evangelicals, he writes:

²⁰Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967), 82.

²¹J. J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 102, 151.

²²*Ibid.*, 28-32, 104, 151. Davis, 30, acknowledges his dependence on William H. Green's article "Primeval Chronology," *BSac* 47 (1890): 285-303.

²³Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 249-254.

[Recent studies have] shown that these early genealogies in Genesis stem from archetypes among West Semitic tribes from the Old Babylonian period where the ten-generation list is frequent. Applying this observation to Gen. 5 leads us to believe that the names of Gen. 5 need not be understood sequentially. Thus the figures cannot be added to arrive at the age of mankind. Instead what we have here are symmetrical genealogies: ten generations before the flood (Gen. 5) and ten generations after the flood (Gen. 11). So when Gen. 5 says that "X fathered Y" it may mean that "X fathered the line culminating in Y."²⁴

Kenneth A. Mathews views the men of Gen 5 and 11 as historical descendants of Seth and Shem, respectively, but he too thinks fluidity has occurred during transmission, resulting in two compressed and symmetrical genealogies.²⁵ Mathews notes that traditionally these genealogies have been understood to include every generation from Adam to Abraham, and that "there is nothing explicit in the passage to indicate otherwise."²⁶ He cannot believe, however, that there are no omissions because "this would leave us with a very short span of time to accommodate all that we know about human history."²⁷ Enoch's seventh-place position in Gen 5, which parallels Boaz's position in David's genealogy as presented in Ruth 4, also indicates to Mathews that Gen 5 and 11 have been schematized, since the number seven symbolizes God's special blessing. Although Mathews fully accepts the idea of gaps in these Genesis genealogies, he insists that said gaps could not be large enough to accommodate the large ages required by evolutionary paleontology, since such huge gaps would defy the biblical convention of listing more generations than are omitted. Thus, in Mathews's view, humankind is only a few thousand years older than Ussher figured.

Ronald F. Youngblood offers another way in which fluidity might have occurred in Gen 5. He suggests the names therein might be the names of outstanding preflood dynasties rather than individuals. Presumably, other less important dynasties were omitted. In this interpretation, the numbers have something to do with the lengths of reign of the rulers. Youngblood

²⁴Ibid., 254. An important study upon which Hamilton draws is Abraham Malamat, "Tribal Societies: Biblical Genealogies and African Lineage Systems," *Archives européennes de sociologie* 14 (1973): 126-136.

²⁵Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 295-305. Mathews, 302, acknowledges that the classic statement of his view is found in Green, 285-303. Mathews, 305, also notes his dependence on Benjamin B. Warfield, "On the Antiquity and the Unity of the Human Race," *Princeton Theology Review* 9 (1911): 1-25.

²⁶Mathews, 302.

²⁷Ibid.

does not say which set of numbers he is referencing, nor what the other sets of numbers might mean. He simply concludes that such an interpretation implies large gaps in the Gen 5 record.²⁸

In summary, the most often mentioned arguments for gaps due to fluidity in the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 are: the genealogies in Gen 4 and 5 are so alike that they must have evolved from a common source; the symmetrical ten-generation form of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies, with emphasis on the seventh position, indicate schematization in the tradition of ancient Mesopotamian king, sage, and ancestor lists; the lives of the patriarchs overlap too much in a no-gap reading of the text; the oft-repeated formula "X fathered Y" should be interpreted to mean that X fathered the line leading to Y; and humankind originated earlier than a no-gap reading of Gen 5 and 11 will allow according to extrabiblical evidence.

The Chronological Genealogy View

Some modern theologians believe not only that Gen 5 and 11 contain the names of actual historical figures, but that those names form a continuous (without generational omissions) and linear genealogy from Adam to Abraham. While they readily acknowledge fluidity as a fairly common occurrence in ancient genealogies, they reason that the occurrence of fluidity in some genealogies does not prove fluidity in all genealogies. They see the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 as two of the many exceptions to the fluidity rule.

In his analysis of early biblical genealogies, Samuel Kulling begins by acknowledging that many biblical genealogies, such as those in Ezra 7 and Matt 1, contain gaps. In his opinion, however, biblical genealogies come in more than one genre. One type of genealogy (e.g., Ezra 7) aims primarily at establishing someone's right to a certain office, position, or inheritance, and needs not include every generation. Another type includes sufficient details, especially numerical data, to indicate it intends to establish a chronology, although other intentions may be present as well. Kulling finds numerous examples of this genre throughout 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles in those brief passages where a king of Israel or Judah is said to have reigned a certain number of years before being succeeded by his son (or a usurper). When grouped together these passages form a twenty-generation chronology for both Israel and Judah, and are often used by theologians for establishing the dates of

²⁸Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis: An Introductory Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 75.

important events. The passages in Genesis giving the age of Abraham at the birth of Isaac and the age of Isaac at the birth of Jacob provide examples of this genre. These patriarchal passages are also commonly used for chronological purposes.²⁹

Kulling then asks to which genre the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 should be assigned. He answers that surely the many numerical notations therein, especially the fathers' ages at procreation, place these genealogies in the second category; that is, with the chronological genealogies. Thus they should be interpreted as possessing no omissions, at least as far as the biblical evidence is concerned.³⁰

Brevard S. Childs also sees genre as an important factor in understanding the nature of the Genesis genealogies.³¹ He finds two kinds of genealogies in Genesis: vertical (linear) and horizontal (segmented). He analyzes the nature and function of these two types in the context of the ten (*toledoth*) generations, which he says structure the entire book and unify it as a continuous history (contra Westermann). In this history, the function of the horizontal genealogies, such as those dealing with Noah's three sons, Ishmael's offspring, and Esau's descendants (Gen 10, 25, and 36, respectively), is to show the spread of humanity in general outside the special chosen line. The vertical genealogies (primarily Gen 5 and 11), on the other hand, deal with the chosen line of blessing and serve to "trace an unbroken line of descendants from Adam to Jacob, and at the same time to provide a framework in which to incorporate the narrative traditions of the patriarchs."³² Childs does not say whether he believes the numbers included in these vertical genealogies are accurate and, therefore, suitable for constructing a pre-Abrahamic chronology, but he does indicate that he believes the author of Genesis intended to set forth a continuous, no-gap genealogy, and that there is no warrant within the biblical text itself for interpreting it otherwise.

Another scholar who emphasizes the role of genealogical genre identification in the interpretive process is David T. Rosevear.³³ Like

²⁹Samuel R. Kulling, *Are the Genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 Historical and Complete: That Is, Without Gaps?* (Reihen, Switzerland: Immanuel-Verlag, 1996), 30-31. In the case of the kings of Israel, there are actually four or more genealogies, since there were at least four new dynasties. Their chronological value is nevertheless evident.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 145-146.

³²Ibid., 146.

³³David T. Rosevear, "The Genealogies of Genesis," in *Concepts in Creationism*, ed. E. H. Andrews, W. Gitt, and W. J. Ouweneel (Welwyn, Eng: Evangelical Press, 1986), 68-77.

Kulling, Rosevear delineates two major types of linear genealogies in the Bible. First, there are incomplete genealogies, which omit generations, and which the ancient writers employed when the inclusion of every generation was not necessary to their task. Conversely, there are complete genealogies, which drop no generations, and which the biblical authors sometimes used to establish a chronological framework for their narratives, among other things. According to Rosevear, the Sethite and Shemite lists bear the marks of the latter type, especially as seen in the consistent record of the number of years between the birth of each generation. Again, like Kulling, Rosevear looks to the books which deal with the kings of Israel and Judah for other examples of this genealogical genre.

James Jordan agrees with Kulling, Childs, and Rosevear concerning the importance of genre identification in the process of determining whether fluidity has occurred in a genealogy, but he advances their arguments a bit further. He posits that rather than two there are actually many different genealogical forms.³⁴ For example, he identifies continuous and discontinuous genealogies, chronological and nonchronological genealogies, genealogies that omit only a few generations and others that omit almost every generation, genealogies that are no more than a list of names and others that come with historical and biographical notations, two-generational and twenty-generational genealogies, linear and segmented genealogies. Each has its own functions and characteristics. Jordan reasons that with this vast array of forms available to the author of Genesis, it is unlikely, to say the least, that he would have chosen the form of Gen 5 and 11 with its careful recitation of the number of years between each generation unless he believed his list of names was complete and without generational gaps. Jordan further reasons that the mere fact that detailed chronological information is included in Gen 5 and 11 demonstrates that these texts belong to a genre directly opposed to the idea of fluidity. In his view, to say there are gaps in these texts is to ignore completely their genre.³⁵

Most of the theologians who deny fluidity in the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 realize their "genre argument," as reasonable as it may sound, will gain credibility only if they can offer reasonable alternative interpretations of the evidence for fluidity. How do they reply to the five main arguments for fluidity?

³⁴James B. Jordan, "The Biblical Chronology Question," *Creation Social Science and Humanities Quarterly* 2 (1979): 1-6.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 6.

Argument 1: The Similarity of Names and Order of Names Indicate a Common Source

The first argument says the names and order of names in the Gen 4 and 5 genealogies are so similar that they must have come from a common source which underwent fluidity during transmission, resulting in two different but similar lists. Theologians opposed to this argument reply that the two lists are really quite different, and that any similarities probably resulted either from the tendency of extended families to use the same names repeatedly or from conflation of two originally separate genealogies.³⁶

Wenham points out that, while the Cainite genealogy covers seven generations, only six of the names bear any resemblance to a name in the Sethite list. Of the six, four require the change or addition of at least one consonant to become identical. The only two exact matches, Enoch and Lamech, are distinguished by additional biographical notations. The Lamech of Gen 4 murders a young man and boasts about it, whereas the Lamech of Gen 5 acknowledges God in the naming of his son. Little is said concerning the first Enoch, but the second one walks with God for at least three hundred years before being taken away by God in a special way. Fluidity cannot account for such vast characterization differences. Thus the two Enochs and the two Lamechs are different men, and there are actually no matches at all. Wenham further points out the differing styles of the two passages, which he believes suggest distinct sources.³⁷

Mathews agrees with Wenham, but sets forth additional differences which he says cannot be attributed to fluidity.³⁸ Genesis 4 seems ignorant of the flood, unlike Gen 5. Genesis 4 has a segmented genealogy after Lamech and mentions his daughter Naamah, unlike Gen 5. Genesis 5 follows a consistent formula in giving the patriarchs' ages at procreation and death, but the language of Gen 4 is much less formulaic and the ages are totally missing. Seth's genealogy is closely tied to creation, but Cain's is set in the context of expulsion from paradise and family. Thus, Mathews concludes, the two chapters derive from different sources.³⁹

Hamilton explains the similarity of names by suggesting that it was not uncommon in ancient times for two people to have the same or similar name at the same time, especially in the same extended family. Parents

³⁶Since some theologians who accept the idea of gaps in Gen 5 and 11 nevertheless believe Gen 4 and 5 came from different sources, their opinions will be included here.

³⁷Wenham, 123-124.

³⁸Mathews, 281-282.

³⁹Mathews does not explain, nor is it clear, why these differences cannot be attributed to fluidity due to function.

throughout all ages have often named their children after uncles, cousins, and so on. Perhaps the Cainites and Sethites did likewise.⁴⁰ Hamilton seems to acknowledge the validity of Robert R. Wilson's theory that form followed function in the use of ancient genealogies; that is, genealogies were often altered to better serve their purpose as social or political tools. Hamilton also agrees with Wilson that Gen 4 functions to show the spread of sin, whereas Gen 5 emphasizes the transmission of the divine image. Hamilton complains, however, that Wilson fails to show how changing the number of generations, changing the names, and changing the order of names in either of these genealogies would better serve their functions.⁴¹ Lacking such information, Hamilton sees no good reason to posit a common source of fluidity.

Among studies which conclude that Gen 4 and 5 descended from different sources, David T. Bryan's is the most exhaustive.⁴² Bryan admits a striking similarity between the two texts as they now stand. He notes that most scholars have explained the likeness by positing one original *vorlage* as the basis for both texts. Thus the original may have been the Sumerian King List or a list of important ancestors. A few scholars have accounted for the likeness in another way. William H. Green argued in the nineteenth century that these genealogies probably experienced partial conflation or assimilation at the time they were translated into Hebrew.⁴³ Recently, notes Bryan, J. J. Finkelstein⁴⁴ and William W. Hallo⁴⁵ advanced a similar theory. Pointing to the Sumerian King List and the similar-sounding list of pre-flood sages (*apkallu*) as a case in which two distinct but closely associated lists gradually grew more alike over time, they suggest the same happened to the Cainite and Sethite genealogies.

Bryan believes one thing is obvious. Since the similarity is too remarkable to be coincidental, fluidity has occurred. Fluidity either caused one list to develop into two or caused two lists to become more like one. Bryan opts for the latter theory. He notes that in known cases of conflation

⁴⁰Hamilton, 250-251.

⁴¹Ibid., 250. Robert R. Wilson's work is addressed more fully later in this study ("The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research," *JBL* 94 [1975]: 169-189); see also idem for a thorough analysis of the forms and functions of ancient and modern genealogies (*Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977], 11-205).

⁴²David T. Bryan, "A Reevaluation of Genesis 4 and 5 in Light of Recent Studies in Genealogical Fluidity," *ZAW* 99 (1987): 180-188.

⁴³Green, 285-303.

⁴⁴J. J. Finkelstein, "The Antediluvian Kings: A University of California Tablet," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 17 (1963): 50.

⁴⁵William W. Hallo, "Antediluvian Cities," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 23 (1970): 63-64.

the two lists are usually still more dissimilar than similar. In cases where one list has evolved into two, the two lists are normally more similar than dissimilar. One might imagine then that one could simply list the similarities and dissimilarities and expect the longer list to indicate the original form. Bryan, however, says this method will not work because some characteristics of genealogies are more prone to fluidity than others. For example, the spelling of an individual's name is much more likely to change than the biographical comments about the same individual. Thus some differences, such as name changes, carry less weight than others, such as changes in description. One must consider the weight of each similarity or dissimilarity in judging the original form.⁴⁶

Working on the basis of this principle, Bryan finds two main similarities: some similar names and a similar order of names, both of which are highly prone to fluidity and, therefore, carry diminished weight. He also finds ten dissimilarities: connection to the flood in Gen 5 is not found in Gen 4; Gen 5 records ten generations, but Gen 4 only seven, or eight if Adam is included; the segmentation after Lamech in Gen 4 appears to be part of the original list, but the segmentation after Noah in Gen 5 appears to be added to the list; the begetting formulas differ; and the functions differ, are prone to change, and carry little weight.

The other five dissimilarities tend to resist fluidity.⁴⁷ One is the absence of Noah in Gen 4. Bryan implies that even a change in function or purpose would not lead to the omission of such an important figure. A second is the inclusion of a segmented generation of three males and a female after Lamech in Gen 4, which is absent entirely in Gen 5. A third fluidity-resistant difference is the stress on the beginnings of certain aspects of culture in Gen 4, which is totally missing from Gen 5. A fourth is the numerical data given throughout Gen 5, but nowhere found in Gen 4. Bryan comments: "This is not easily explained by fluidity since even in the [Sumerian King List] the varying traditions of seven to ten kings all have the [numbers] included. The numbers are present even in texts that are fragmented."⁴⁸

The final fluidity-resistant dissimilarity listed by Bryan is the difference in biographical information concerning the two Enochs and the two Lamechs. The Cainite Enoch is associated with the building of a city, but the Sethite Enoch walks with God. The Lamech of Cain's line commits murder and brags about it, but his counterpart fathers

⁴⁶Bryan, 180-182.

⁴⁷Ibid., 183-187.

⁴⁸Ibid., 187.

righteous Noah and prophecies about it.⁴⁹ Because he judges these five dissimilarities to be resistant to fluidity, Bryan grants them great weight and determinative importance. He concludes that the two texts are so different that they must have come from separate sources which partially assimilated over time. Thus he believes that fluidity has occurred with regard to the spelling of names, but not necessarily with regard to the omission of names.

Argument 2: The Symmetrical Ten-generation
Form of the Text and the Prominence of
the Seventh Position Indicate
Schematization

How do theologians who deny fluidity has altered the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 reply to the second main argument for fluidity, which says the symmetrical ten-generation form of these texts and the prominence of the seventh position in the texts indicate schematization in accord with a standard Ancient Near Eastern pattern? Their replies follow several lines of thought.

Jordan simply states that there is “no reason why Genesis 5 and 11 cannot reflect the actual historical state of affairs; indeed, the inclusion of the father’s age at the birth of the son militates against any gaps . . . and thus favors historical accuracy.”⁵⁰ Jordan does not, however, ignore the ten-generation literary convention of the Ancient Near East. On the basis of P. J. Wiseman’s theory that Genesis is structured around and compiled from a number of *toledoth* (historical records), which were recorded near the time of the events and then handed down from generation to generation in ancient times,⁵¹ Jordan suggests that the record preserved in Gen 5 predates and may be the source of the convention.⁵²

Richard Niessen reasons that just because some ten-generation lists have been schematized does not necessarily mean that all have been. In his view, Gen 5 and 11 record ten generations each because there actually were ten generations before the flood and after the flood to

⁴⁹Ibid., 187-188.

⁵⁰Jordan, 9.

⁵¹P. J. Wiseman, *New Discoveries in Babylonia about Genesis* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1958), 45-89. See also Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 91-125; and R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 63-64, 542-553. Harrison, 552, asserts: “There can be no real questions as to the immense antiquity of the source material that is to be found in Genesis.”

⁵²Jordan, 9.

Abraham. He notes that nothing in the texts indicates otherwise, and the numbers indicate no omissions have been made. Niessen admits that the genealogy in Matt 1 has been schematized, but since Matthew lists three sets of fourteen generations, surely this simply proves that ancient scribes were not locked into a ten-generation form. Niessen also notes that believing Gen 5 and 11 have been schematized because Matt 1 has been ignores the fact that they are different types of literature; that is, the Genesis texts have numbers, but Matt 1 does not. Thus comparing Gen 5 and 11 to Matt 1 is like comparing apples to oranges, and constitutes a basic hermeneutical error.⁵³

Kulling points out a stunning reality that almost everyone seems to have overlooked; namely, that the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies are not really symmetrical. The *toledoth* of Adam contains ten names (Adam to Noah), with the tenth having three sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth). The *toledoth* of Shem records only nine names (Shem to Terah) with the ninth fathering three sons (Abraham, Nahor, and Haran).

Adam's *toledoth* (Gen 5:1-32)

Shem's *toledoth* (Gen 11:10-26)

1. Adam	1. Shem
2. Seth	2. Arphaxad
3. Enosh	3. Shelah
4. Kenan	4. Eber
5. Mahalaleel	5. Peleg
6. Jared	6. Reu
7. Enoch	7. Serug
8. Methuselah	8. Nahor
9. Lamech	9. Terah (three sons)
10. Noah (three sons)	

To say that Abraham (Abram) counts as the tenth generation in Gen 11 is no help to symmetry, because consistency would then

⁵³Richard Niessen, "A Biblical Approach to Dating the Earth: A Case for the Use of Genesis 5 and 11 as an Exact Chronology," *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 19 (June 1982): 63.

demand that Shem be counted in Gen 5 (cf. 11:26 with 5:32). The supposed symmetry does not really exist.⁵⁴

To these arguments must be added the findings of several well-known and widely respected scholars who do not necessarily support a no-gap view of Gen 5 and 11, but who nevertheless maintain that these biblical genealogies have no connection to the Sumerian King List, or who conclude that there is in fact no ten-generation pattern among the ancient king, sage, or tribal ancestor lists. A few examples must suffice.

In a carefully reasoned and well-documented article, Gerhard F. Hasel analyzes all the relevant ancient texts and concludes no connection exists, either in fact or in form, between Gen 5 and the Sumerian King List (SKL).⁵⁵ He gives ten reasons.

1. SKL names are distinct from those of Genesis in terms of languages.
2. SKL gives years of reign, not life-spans, due to different function.
3. SKL links kings with cities, not fathers with sons.
4. SKL uses much larger numbers.
5. SKL argues for the continued political unity of Sumer and Akkad under one king, but Gen 5 has nothing to do with politics.
6. SKL lists kings, not ancestors.
7. SKL is local in scope, not universal as is Gen 5.
8. SKL starts with the beginning of kingship, not man.
9. SKL ends with a king named Suruppak, not a flood hero like Noah.
10. SKL does not really exist consistently in a ten-generation form.

In connection with the last reason, Hasel notes that as recently as 1965 a major study concluded that the Hebrew borrowed the ten-generation pattern of Gen 5 from the Sumerian King List.⁵⁶ Hasel, however, points out that:

the major rescension of the Sumerian King List (WB 444) contains only eight and not ten kings. One text contains only seven kings (W)

⁵⁴Kulling, 33-34. W. H. Gispen also acknowledges the lack of symmetry (*Genesis, Commentaar op het Oude Testament* [Kampen, Netherlands: Kok, 1974], 385-386). The LXX lists an additional generation in Gen 11, but strong evidence indicates this was a scribal addition. See the third chapter of my dissertation "The Chronological Value of Genesis 5 and 11 in Light of Recent Biblical Investigation" (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998).

⁵⁵Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 and Their Alleged Babylonian Background," *AUSS* 16 (1978): 361-374. See also K. Luke, "The Genealogies in Genesis 5," *Indian Theological Studies* 18 (1981): 223-244.

⁵⁶See W. G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," *JTS* 16 (1965): 287-300, esp. 292-293.

and another (UCBC 9-1819) either seven or eight, whereas a bilingual fragment from Ashurbanipal's library has but nine kings. Berossos and only one ancient tablet (WB 62), i.e. only two texts (of which only one is a cuneiform document), give a total of ten antediluvian kings. On the basis of the cuneiform data it can no longer be suggested that the Sumerian King List contained originally ten antediluvian kings after which the biblical genealogies were patterned.⁵⁷

Hasel makes two additional arresting observations. First, "the supposedly unbroken line of descent in Genesis 5 is in stark contrast to the concurrent or contemporaneous dynasties of the Sumerian King List."⁵⁸ Then he reminds his readers that the Sumerian King List lists thirty-nine postdiluvians, about four times as many as Gen 11 lists.⁵⁹

Wenham twice makes reference to the different number of preflood kings in the various Mesopotamian versions of the Sumerian King Lists, thus showing his doubt about a ten-generation norm.⁶⁰ He does see, especially in T. Jacobsen's reconstructed Sumerian version,⁶¹ a correspondence in the order of events between the Sumerian flood story and Gen 5-9, 11. To him, this demonstrates not dependence of one on the other, but a common, early tradition about, for instance, the beginnings of the world, humankind, civilization, and the flood. The differences in the genealogical parts of the two versions, he implies, have to do with the purpose for which they were used. A Sumerian story writer may have inverted the names of a number of early kings in a politically motivated effort to justify his city's claim to leadership in Mesopotamia. Other cities may have inserted different names of kings in different numbers to support their claims. The Hebrews meanwhile worked from the same historical framework, but did not insert a king list, since they had no political agenda. Instead, they used the names of their forefathers all the way back to the first man for religious and/or historiographic reasons. The point is that the Hebrew ancestor list of Gen 5 does not appear dependent on any Sumerian king list for its names or ten-generation form.⁶²

Robert R. Wilson argues vigorously that a standard Ancient Near Eastern ten-generation genealogical form simply did not exist, or at least has not yet been demonstrated. Among theologians who think generations have been omitted to make Gen 5 and 11 fit a standard ten-

⁵⁷Hasel, 367.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Wenham, 124.

⁶¹T. Jacobsen, "The Eridu Genesis," *JBL* 100 (1981): 513-529.

⁶²Wenham, xxxix-xli, 123-125. M. B. Rowton also suggests a political motive behind the SKL ("The Date of the Sumerian King List," *JNES* 19 [1960]: 156-162).

generation form, the works of Abraham Malamat have been influential.⁶³ As already mentioned, Westermann credits him with demonstrating the common use of a ten-name pattern in ancient genealogies. Many others also show dependence on Malamat's studies in this regard. In a thorough analysis of Malamat's studies, however, Wilson concludes that while Malamat made some significant contributions to academe's understanding of ancient genealogies, his conclusion concerning the ten-generation pattern was unjustified.⁶⁴

Malamat attempts to show similarities between OT genealogical forms and Ancient Near Eastern genealogical patterns.⁶⁵ He sometimes uses studies of modern tribal genealogies to back up his claims of a standard form. An Assyrian king list and the Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty form the basis for his comparisons. Malamat says he discovered that these ancient Amorite documents had four divisions, and that these same divisions could also be found in the biblical genealogies as a rule.⁶⁶

The first division, which he labeled "genealogical stock" in the Assyrian king list and Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty, contained twelve and eleven names, respectively, after a few adjustments, and consisted of artificial names (sometimes tribal names) arbitrarily linked together. Citing also modern tribal genealogies of nine to eleven generations, he concluded these were evidence of a standard ten-generation form as found in Genesis, since all of these lists were near ten generations.⁶⁷

The second division, the "determinative line," was used to link the genealogical stock with the rest of the list. Here the number of names listed amounts to five in the Assyrian king list and two in the Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty. In the Bible, it began with Abraham and ended with Judah—only four generations.⁶⁸

⁶³Abraham Malamat, "King Lists of the Old Babylonian Period and Biblical Genealogies," in *Essays in Memory of E. A. Speiser*, ed. William W. Hallo, American Oriental Series 53 (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1968), 163-173; idem, "Mari and the Bible: Some Patterns of Tribal Organization and Institutions," *JAOS* 82 (1962): 143-150; idem, "Tribal Societies," 126-136.

⁶⁴Robert R. Wilson, "The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research," *JBL* 94 (1975): 169-189; see also idem for a thorough analysis of the forms and functions of ancient and modern genealogies (*Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977], 11-205).

⁶⁵Malamat, "King Lists," 163-173.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 164.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 165-168.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 168-169.

The "table of ancestors" formed the third division and was used to link the determinative line to the last division. In the Assyrian king list, this division is clearly marked by the superscription "ten kings who are ancestors," and consists of the genealogy of Samsi-Adad, a well-known king. In the Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty, the division is not clearly marked, but Malamat believed originally it contained ten names, although fluidity has made this unclear. He again cited some modern tribal genealogies near the ten-generation depth. The ten ancestors of David found in Ruth 4 provide a biblical example. He also suggested that the Bible meant to preserve ten ancestors of Saul, but he could find only seven.⁶⁹

The final division, the "historical line," consists of the immediate ancestors of a king or important person who wished to validate his right to a position by linking his line with his predecessors. This division is quite long in the Assyrian king list and the Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty. He found no example in the Bible, but felt their existence at one time was quite possible.⁷⁰

From this analysis, Malamat concludes that in Amorite culture the ideal form for a table of ancestors was ten generations, just as is found in Gen 5 and 11. A short time later, T. C. Hartman added support to Malamat's conclusion.⁷¹ Hartman argued that Speiser erred in connecting Gen 5 to the Sumerian King List since there are numerous and basic differences. He also found fault with Speiser for tracing the ten-generation form to the Sumerian King List because most versions of it have fewer than ten names. Based on his consideration of Malamat's work, Hartman concluded that the ten-name form of Gen 5 probably came from the Amorite preference for ten-name genealogies.

Wilson finds major weaknesses in the arguments and conclusions of Malamat and Hartman. First, Wilson points out that the four-division genealogical pattern supposedly found in the Assyrian king list and the Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty simply does not exist in the OT. For instance, the names of Malamat's second division in Scripture, Abraham through Judah, never appear together in a linear genealogy in the OT. Furthermore, Malamat himself cannot give an example from the Bible which fits his fourth division.⁷²

Second, based on his extensive study of genealogies as used by

⁶⁹Ibid., 169-171.

⁷⁰Ibid., 164.

⁷¹T. C. Hartman, "Some Thoughts on the Sumerian King List and Genesis 5 and 11B," *JBL* 91 (1972): 25-32.

⁷²Wilson, "Old Testament Genealogies," 178.

modern Arab and African tribal societies, Wilson concludes that linear genealogies regularly vary in depth from about five to as many as nineteen generations. Thus, tribal societies do not favor one particular depth. He implies that Malamut selects only those tribal generations which support his ten-generation theory to use as examples, while ignoring the many genealogies of different depths. Even then the examples vary from nine to eleven generations and must be adjusted to fit exactly the ten-name form.⁷³

Third, Wilson notes that of the eight sections which Malamut says make up the Assyrian king list and the Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty (four each), only one actually contains ten names in its present form. The four sections of the Assyrian king list contain twelve, five, ten, and seventy-seven names, respectively. The Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty contains eleven names in its first section and two in its second. The third and fourth sections are not clearly marked. Malamut resorts to arbitrary adjustments and divisions to give the general impression of a standard depth, but none actually exists, whether it be ten or any other number.⁷⁴ In an understatement, Wilson concludes: “[Malamut] has not supplied enough evidence to support his claim that those genealogies had a stereotypical ten-generation depth or a four-part structure.”⁷⁵

Fourth, Wilson points out that the Assyrian king list and the Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty fall into the king-list category. Neither emphasizes kinship relationships, and often names are listed without any genealogical or biographical references. Genesis 5 and 11, on the other hand, show characteristics of a family genealogy. Wilson claims, therefore, that it is methodologically incorrect to compare the Assyrian king list and the Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty with the Genesis records since they are different types of literature.⁷⁶

Wilson agrees with Malamut and Hartman concerning the fairly

⁷³Ibid., 175-179. For a thorough discussion of modern Arab and African genealogies, see Wilson, *Genealogy*, 18-55.

⁷⁴Wilson, “Old Testament Genealogies,” 182-188.

⁷⁵Ibid., 188. Malamut’s own tentative language lends support to Wilson’s conclusion that Malamut failed to prove his case. For example, in his discussion of the supposed ten-generation form of ancient genealogies, Malamut, at one point, uses eight tentative words or phrases—(1) possible, (2) possibly, (3) may have been, (4) we may also assume, (5) puzzling, (6) we most likely, (7) if we assume, (8) tendency—in the space of just eight sentences (“King Lists,” 165-166). Such language undermines his confident-sounding conclusion that “the ante and postdiluvian lines [of Adam and Shem, respectively], symmetrically arranged to a ten-generation depth, are undoubtedly the product of intentional harmonization and in imitation of the concrete genealogical model.”

⁷⁶Wilson, “Old Testament Genealogies,” 187.

common occurrence of fluidity in ancient and modern genealogies. He cautions, however, that fluidity in some genealogies does not mean fluidity in all genealogies. Each genealogy has a different function and setting, so each must be examined individually; thus “no generalizations are possible.”⁷⁷

Bryan has challenged the idea put forth by Sasson and others that an emphasis on the seventh position in the early Genesis genealogies indicates schematization. Sasson himself acknowledges the absence of such a practice in ancient Mesopotamian genealogies and king lists.⁷⁸ He also admits that even the Hebrews failed to use it consistently.⁷⁹ Pointing beyond these basic weaknesses in Sasson’s theory to a methodological weakness, Bryan writes:

[Sasson’s] methodology is inconsistent. Arguing that Eber is seventh from Enoch, he begins counting with the generations following Enoch. Then when asserting that Abraham is seventh from Eber, he starts counting with Eber. If he were consistent, Abraham would be number six from Eber.⁸⁰

Bryan points to what he thinks is another methodological error. Sasson assumes that the Cainite and Sethite genealogies sprang from a common *vorlage* with Lamech in the seventh position. Once adopted, this assumption leads to the inevitable conclusion that Enoch was inserted into the list. According to Bryan, this kind of reasoning amounts to begging the fluidity question, since the unproved assumption is the main evidence for the conclusion.⁸¹

Argument 3: Overlap of the Patriarchs’ Lives in a No-gap Reading Indicates Fluidity

The third main argument for fluidity is that the lives of the Gen 5 and 11 patriarchs overlap to an unbelievable extent in a no-gap reading of the text. For example, before the flood Adam lived until after the birth of Lamech (Noah’s father), and all of the patriarchs from Adam to Methusealah for a brief period were contemporaries. After the flood, Shem almost outlived Abraham, and Eber did outlive Abraham by a few years. How do chronological genealogy advocates explain such an incredible scenario?

Jordan’s explanation is typical. He claims there is no objective

⁷⁷Ibid., 189.

⁷⁸Sasson, 172.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Bryan, 181.

⁸¹Ibid., 182.

reason to reject the idea that these patriarchs' lives overlapped to a great extent. Such an idea seems strange to modern scholars, says Jordan, only because they have been conditioned to think that long ages passed between the time of Adam and the time of Abraham. Previous generations of scholars saw nothing incredible about overlapping patriarchal life spans at all.⁸² For example, Martin Luther wrote:

But Noah saw his descendants up to the tenth generation. He died when Abraham was about fifty-eight years old. Shem lived with Isaac about 110 years and with Esau and Jacob about fifty years. It must have been a very blessed church that was directed for so long a time by so many pious patriarchs who lived together for so many years.⁸³

Jordan acknowledges that Scripture records little about contact between the men of Gen 5 and 11. He offers two possible explanations for this lack of information. First, such information was unnecessary to the author's purpose. Second, many of the men seem to have migrated to different geographical areas, thus making contact difficult and rare.⁸⁴

According to Jordan, most theologians believe that, because a long period of time (perhaps several millennia) passed between the flood and the call of Abraham, the knowledge of God was lost, and Abraham was called to restore that knowledge. Against this scenario, Jordan notes that Melchizedek and his city seemed to have possessed a full knowledge of God before Abraham, as did Job and his culture, although Job's friends misapplied their knowledge.⁸⁵ After Abraham's day, but apparently without contact with Abraham's descendants, Balaam knew about and prophesied in the name of YHWH. Presumably other prophets did likewise. For Jordan, such widespread knowledge of God argues against the idea of a long period between the flood and Abraham and argues for greatly overlapping patriarchal life spans.⁸⁶

⁸²Jordan, 4.

⁸³Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 199; cited in Jordan, 1-2.

⁸⁴Jordan, 4. Jordan suggests that the *Gilgamesh Epic* may have a historical basis and may provide an example of one of these rare visits of one patriarch to another. In the epic, Gilgamesh takes a long trip to find the old man who survived the flood, Utnapishtim, who promptly tells him about the flood.

⁸⁵Jordan, 4, assumes a date for Job prior to the time of Abraham, at least as far as the heart of Job's story is concerned.

⁸⁶Jordan, 4-5. In this view, Joshua's charge that Abraham's forefathers worshiped pagan gods (Josh 24:2) is taken in a general sense, just as charges of idolatry against all Israel by later prophets, such as Jeremiah and even Jesus, are commonly understood to allow for exceptions.

Argument 4: Gen 5 and 11 Genealogical Lists Present Family Lines, Not Immediate Descendants

The fourth main argument for gaps due to fluidity in the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 is that the regularly repeated formula "When X had lived Y years, he became the father of Z" should be interpreted to mean that X lived Y years and became the father of someone in the list of descent that led to Z. This interpretation leaves room for any number of generations between X and Z. Of all the arguments for gaps due to fluidity, those who deny gaps in Gen 5 and 11 respond most vociferously to this one. They seem genuinely stunned that an interpretation they consider to be in violation of a basic hermeneutical principle and contrary to the plain words of the text is seriously advocated by so many theologians, including leading conservative evangelicals. Jordan contends knowledgeable theologians would never imagine such an interpretation, let alone advocate it, were it not for their old-earth presuppositions and the resulting pressure to make the text compatible with their old-earth scale.⁸⁷

According to the reasoning of chronological genealogy advocates, one of the most widely accepted principles of interpretation, especially among those who employ the grammatical-historical method, is that the author's intended meaning is the correct meaning of the text.⁸⁸ How does one know the author's intended meaning? His meaning is normally the most obvious sense of his statements, as determined by his target audience.⁸⁹ Throughout Jewish and church history up until the time of Lyell and Darwin, virtually all believers, the target audience, understood Gen 5 and 11 as continuous genealogies which recorded a name from every generation between Adam and Abraham and the number of years between those generations.⁹⁰ To change the wording of the formula from "When X had lived Y years, he became the father of Z" to "When X had lived Y years, he begat someone in the line of descent that led to

⁸⁷Ibid., 6.

⁸⁸E. D. Hirsch Jr. analyzes this principle in depth and concludes that it is undoubtedly correct since language signs cannot speak their own meaning (*Validity in Interpretation* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967], 1-23).

⁸⁹Obvious exceptions to this rule can be found in Scripture. For example, Jesus sometimes spoke in veiled language which the unrepentant people of his day misinterpreted. Jesus, however, was by his own admission deliberately avoiding a straightforward presentation of his message. The vast majority of the time the biblical writers presumably tried to communicate their message as clearly as they could within their space limitations. Thus the rule stands.

⁹⁰See the introduction to this study.

Z" changes the author's intended meaning and constitutes a major violation of a well-established hermeneutical principle.⁹¹

Did the target audience misunderstand the author's intended meaning by overlooking the fact that X fathered Y can mean that X was the ancestor of Y? Surely they did not, say the no-gap advocates, since the ambiguous nature of the word "father" has always been well known. In the case of Gen 5 and 11, the audience rejected such an interpretation, because the author took great pains to include in his text the number of years between the birth of each man listed and the birth of each man's successor. These numbers are superfluous and entirely without meaning unless the author intended to tie the names together in a continuous sequence of generations.⁹²

The correctness of the audience's interpretation is confirmed, according to continuous genealogy advocates, in at least four ways. First, no other reasonable explanation for the presence of the numbers has ever been set forth. Second, ancient literature affords no example in which the formula "X lived Y years and begat Z" can be shown to mean that there were generations between X and Z. Third, the Genesis text itself establishes that no generations came between Adam and Seth (5:3), Seth and Enosh (4:26), Lamech and Noah (5:28), Noah and Shem (6:10, 7:13, 8:15, 9:18, 10:1, 11:10), Eber and Peleg (10:25), or Terah and Abraham (11:27-32), thus making the generations between the other men unlikely. Fourth, in the NT, Jude, apparently an early church leader and half-brother of Jesus, speaks of Enoch as "the seventh from Adam" (Jude 14), thus demonstrating his belief that there were no gaps from Adam to Enoch, and probably indicating the belief that both the genealogy of Adam and the genealogy of Shem are without gaps. According to the reasoning of the continuous genealogy advocates, since Jude was much closer to and presumably more familiar with ancient literature, his opinion should carry more weight than that of modern interpreters.⁹³

Argument 5: Extrabiblical Evidence Demonstrates That Humankind Originated Earlier Than a No-gap Reading of Gen 5 and 11 Will Allow

The fifth and final argument for gaps due to fluidity in the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 is that, according to extrabiblical evidence (e.g., scientific evidence), humankind originated longer ago than a no-gap

⁹¹Kulling, 25-36; Niessen, 61-65; Rosevear, 73; Bert Thompson, *Creation Compromises* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, 1995), 175; and Jordan, 5-6.

⁹²Rosevear, 72-73; Niessen, 62-63.

⁹³Kulling, 25-36; Niessen, 61-65; Rosevear, 73; and Jordan, 5-6.

reading of these two genealogies will allow. Because the reply of chronological genealogy advocates to this argument is voluminous, technical, and complicated, it is beyond the scope of this study.

In summary, those who take the chronological genealogy view insist that the first step in deciding the fluidity question is genre identification. Ancient genealogies came in different forms to serve different functions. Some forms accommodated fluidity; others did not. The inclusion of the age of each patriarch at procreation marks Gen 5 and 11 as chronological genealogies, a genre which excludes the idea of fluidity.

For chronological genealogy advocates, the second step in deciding the fluidity question consists of exposing weaknesses in the arguments for fluidity. First, advocates point out that the Cainite and Sethite genealogies have more, and more significant, dissimilarities than similarities, thus indicating that they probably did not evolve from the same proposed original source. The similarities are best explained by the tendency of extended families to use the same or similar names repeatedly, or from conflation in the spelling of the names, rather than normal fluidity. Second, they maintain that there was no such thing as a standard ten-generation form for ancient genealogies (especially Wilson contra Malamat), nor was emphasis on the seventh position standard. Third, they point out, while overlapping patriarchal life spans might seem suspect to the modern mind, no one has yet shown why these ancient men could not have been contemporaries, just as earlier theologians thought. Fourth, the chronological genealogy advocates argue that no literary precedent exists for interpreting "X lived Y years and fathered Z" as "X lived Y years and fathered the line leading to Z." They further maintain that this latter interpretation would violate a basic hermeneutical principle and render meaningless all of the "Y" numbers given in the formula repeated eighteen times in Gen 5 and 11.

Critical Evaluation

The fluidity question as previously posed asks, "Did fluidity for the purpose of compression, symmetry, or any other reason occur during the transmission of the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11?" Scholarly attempts to answer this question revolve around five issues.

The first issue involves the importance of genre identification in the interpretive process. The foregoing discussion reveals a tendency among gap advocates to see all genealogies as the same genre. Although they often talk of different genealogical forms and functions, in practice they regularly draw conclusions concerning one genealogy by comparing it

to a genealogy of a different sort. Their comparison of Matt 1, which has no numbers, with Gen 5, which has three different numbers for each of the twenty generations, and then assuming gaps in Gen 5 because of known gaps in Matt 1, provides a prime example of indifference to genre. Such indifference is hermeneutically indefensible. The multitude of genealogical forms extant in the biblical world should not only provide scholars clues to different functions, but also to different rules of interpretation. Since no-gap advocates emphasize careful attention and strict conformance to such rules, the high ground on this aspect of the issue goes to them.

Simply calling for genre identification and adherence to appropriate interpretive rules, however, does not insure that one can accurately identify a genre. No-gap advocates identify Gen 5 and 11 as chronological genealogies primarily because the age at which each patriarch "fathered" the next person on the list is given. Do such procreation ages really mark a genealogy as chronological? No-gap proponents can give only a few examples of genealogical materials which use the age of a father at the birth of a son for chronological purposes. These examples come almost exclusively from the patriarchal accounts in Gen 12–50. On the other hand, gap proponents can give absolutely no evidence, ancient or modern, biblical or extrabiblical, in which a "father's" age at the birth of a certain son was clearly not meant to convey chronological information. Thus no precedent exists for understanding the procreation ages in a nonchronological way. On balance, then, these ages are best understood as marks of a chronological genealogy.

The second issue scholars debate in an attempt to decide the fluidity question concerns the similarity of the Cainite (Gen 4) and the Sethite (Gen 5) genealogies. Did one original list evolve through fluidity into two similar lists? The similarity of names is too conspicuous to be ignored and can hardly be explained as coincidence. On the other hand, there are numerous dissimilarities, some of which are not usually found in two lists which come from the same source. Only Bryan's well-documented suggestion that the similarity of names resulted from the conflation of two separate sources adequately accounts for both the similarities and dissimilarities. Conflation, of course, is a form of fluidity, but in this case it deals only with changes in the spelling of names, not the omission of names. Thus Bryan's view is consistent with the no-gap view regarding the fluidity question.

The third issue of note in the scholarly debate concerning the fluidity question concerns the possible schematization of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies to fit a standard ten-generation form with emphasis on the

seventh position. Malamat's works on this issue led almost all scholars to believe that such a form was standard in the Ancient Near East, and that the Genesis author dropped names from his genealogical source in order to meet the accepted pattern. Wilson's subsequent work, however, has pointed out significant flaws in Malamat's methods and conclusions, and has shown that both Ancient Near Eastern king lists and modern tribal genealogies vary greatly in the number of generations included with no preference evident for any particular length. Hasel has shown that the Sumerian King List can no longer be used as an example of a standard ten-generation form since nearly all versions of the list contain between seven and nine generations. Thus if a ten-generation pattern ever existed, it has yet to be demonstrated. Scholars no longer have an evidentiary basis for assuming the schematization of Gen 5 and 11.

The fourth issue debated in relation to the fluidity question pertains to the overlapping patriarchal life spans. Gap advocates find the overlaps too large and incredible to be true, while no-gap advocates fail to see any objective reason to doubt them. Since they give no other reason, the incredulity of the gap advocates appears to stem from their commitment to a date for the flood prior to 3500 B.C. and for the creation of humans prior to 10,000 B.C. Their case then rests on historical and scientific arguments concerning human chronology. As far as the biblical literature is concerned, nothing militates against the idea that many of the Gen 5 and 11 men were contemporaries, just as Luther believed.

The fifth issue often discussed in the debate over the fluidity question concerns whether the formula "X fathered Z" should be interpreted to mean that X fathered the line leading to Z. The most telling evidence on this issue is the fact that the latter interpretation was virtually unknown by Jews or Christians prior to A.D. 1800. If the Genesis writer intended for his target audience to understand that there were names omitted from his list, then he failed miserably. There is no doubt that widespread acceptance of Lyellian geology and Darwinian biology, rather than sound hermeneutical principles, fostered the new interpretation. Green and Warfield, the source of the new interpretation, admitted their purpose was to save the credibility of the OT in the face of the new science. In attempting to do so, they ignored over two thousand years of interpretive history. Other evidences are telling as well. The presence of the fathers' ages at the birth of their sons is clearly superfluous, even misleading, if generations are missing between fathers and sons. One strains without success to even imagine why the Genesis author would include these ages unless he meant to tie the generations together in a continuous sequence. Since no one has yet pointed out

another example in all of ancient literature where omissions are known to exist in a genealogy which gives the age of X at the birth of Z, what ground exists for interpreting Gen 5 and 11 in such a way? To date, no such ground has been offered, let alone established.

In summary, the case for fluidity during transmission of the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies suffers from a lack of evidence. While all parties readily acknowledge fluidity in some ancient genealogies, scholars have yet to present sound evidence of fluidity in the Sethite and Shemite lists. Conflation adequately explains the similarity between Gen 4 and 5. Wilson has shown that the supposed ten-generation standard genealogical form was a myth based on selected evidence. Arguments against overlapping patriarchal life spans lack biblical support. No precedent exists for interpreting the formula "X lived Y years and fathered Z" to mean that "X lived Y years and fathered the line of Z." Such a meaning would in fact contradict many centuries of interpretive history.

Thus the main arguments for fluidity in this case lack a firm basis. This lack of evidence for fluidity does not mean necessarily that fluidity has not occurred, because evidence might yet come to light. At present, however, one might easily conclude, at least as far as the biblical evidence is concerned, that no omissions, additions, or alterations (other than name confluations) have been made to the Gen 5 and 11 genealogies.