

ARTICLE VII.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL VALUE OF THE GENEALOGY IN
GENESIS V.

BY FREDERIC GARDINER, D.D., PROFESSOR IN THE BERKELEY DIVINITY
SCHOOL, MIDDLETOWN, CONN.

THE first impression produced by reading over the genealogy in the fifth chapter of Genesis is, perhaps, that each of the patriarchs mentioned was the first-born of his father. On a moment's reflection, however, it appears a most extraordinary circumstance that in all the long line from the creation to the flood, each first-born should have been a son, and should have lived to become himself a father, and a father, too, whose first child was a son. On a closer examination of the narrative, it is found that this is not at all asserted. On the contrary, the very first name on the list shows that it was not intended. Gen. v. 3 reads, "Adam lived 130 years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image, and called his name Seth." But we know, from the previous chapter, that Cain and Abel had been born long before — long enough to have been engaged in manly occupations before the birth of Seth; and it is altogether probable that the unknown daughter of Adam who became the wife of Cain, and perhaps also many sons and daughters of whom no mention at all is made, were born in the long interval between the births of Cain and Abel and that of Seth. The first impression derived from this genealogy is, therefore, certainly wrong. May this be also true of other and more important impressions?

It is stated of each of the patriarchs mentioned in this genealogy, that he lived so many years, and begat a certain son, and that after he had begotten this son, he lived so many years and died. Hence it has been thought possible,

by adding together the number of years in each case before paternity, to determine the whole length of the period embraced in the genealogy, and consequently the time which man existed upon the earth, or, at least, the time during which more than a single pair existed, before the deluge. This determination is one of much interest, both in itself and in its connection with recent scientific investigations. It has been thought to rest upon a secure basis, and has become the foundation of various chronological systems; the only point of uncertainty being whether the numbers as given in the Hebrew, the Samaritan, or the Septuagint were the most to be relied upon. It may seem rash to call such a conclusion in question; and it is obvious that if it should be set aside we are left without any basis for antediluvian chronology, except such as, determined by almost the whole length of the patriarchal lives, would be included only within very wide limits — limits separated by extremes of three or four thousand years.

Let us then see precisely what is the basis on which the present chronological systems rest. It is said, simply and distinctly: "Adam lived 130 years, and begat a son, and called his name Seth." It is added, as if for the very purpose of making the chronology more explicit, "The days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were 800 years, and all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died." Now $930 - 800 = 130$, agreeing exactly with the number before mentioned. The same method of statement is used in each case throughout the genealogy; so that we seem to have in the agreement of the direct and the indirect numbers a very sure basis for chronology. It has already been seen, however, that in this matter first appearances are not necessarily reliable. The text may not, upon closer examination mean that which it was at first supposed to assert. Does it, or does it not, do so in the present instance?

If a theory of an opposite character were to be proposed, it might be expressed something in this way: In the extreme brevity of the early history, it was sought to record two facts

in one — the age in each case of commencing paternity, and the name of the particular son by whom the line was continued. Thus Seth, e.g., might have begun to be a father at 105, but might have actually begotten Enos at any reasonable time during the 807 years which he afterwards lived; so that the true meaning of the text would be shown by a paraphrase running in this wise: "Seth lived 105 years, and begat children, among whom was Enos; and Seth lived after his beginning to beget children 807 years, and begat both sons and daughters; and all the days of Seth were 912 years, and he died."

The very obvious reply to such a theory would be that it is at variance with the explicit statement of the text, and the language used is quite too definite to admit of so free a paraphrase. Such an answer, however, only throws us back upon an examination of the *usus loquendi*. If similar statements are elsewhere made, when we *know* they must be interpreted in accordance with the above theory, then, of course, we are free to apply the same interpretation here. The possibilities of showing this are extremely limited, from the fact that the only genealogies in this form extant are those of the fifth and of the eleventh chapters of Genesis. Of very few of the names therein mentioned is there any other record whatsoever. It is, therefore, remarkable that there should yet be two instances in which it is quite manifest that the apparent chronology of the text is apparent only, not real. One of these instances occurs in connection with the last name in each of the genealogies.

In Gen. v. 32 occurs the statement, "Noah was 500 years old; and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth." Let us turn aside a moment from the main point, to consider the seniority of these brothers. The natural inference from the order of the names would be that Shem was the eldest, and this supposition gains strength with each repetition of the names in the same order. Such repetitions occur in vii. 13, ix. 18, and x. 1. When their descendants are given, however, in chap. x., the order is reversed; Japheth is put first,

and Shem last; and in x. 21 the whole matter is settled, according to the authorized version, by the express mention of Shem as "the brother of Japheth the elder." It may, indeed, be urged that the Hebrew is equally capable of the translation, "the elder brother of Japheth"; but the ambiguity must have been rightly solved in the authorized version, since Ham (ix. 22, 24) was "the younger son"; and it will presently appear that Shem was not born until two or three years after the time when Noah is said to have begotten Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Here, then, we have another proof that first impressions are not always trustworthy in these genealogical matters. There are many other instances in which the name of the younger brother is put before that of the elder, because of more importance in connection with the purposes of the narrative. Thus Abram is put before Nahor and Haran, although really the younger, Isaac before Ishmael, Jacob before Esau, etc.

To return to the case of Noah. He was (v. 32) 500 years old when he begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth; but which of them? for it is evident they were not all born at one birth. Again, Noah was 600 years old (vii. 6) "when the flood of waters was upon the earth." If, then, we insist upon the exact statement of the genealogy, Shem must have been exactly 100, or at least within a few months of that age; but we learn, from xi. 10, that actually he was not 100 until "two years *after* the flood." The reconciliation of this discrepancy is extremely easy on the foregoing hypothesis: Noah began his paternity at 500 years old; but Shem, although mentioned first, was not actually begotten until at least two years, or—allowing for the duration of the flood—three years later.

It is no valid objection to this instance that the variation in dates is so small. A variation in the definite statement of numbers, whether large or small, needs to be accounted for; and here the same hypothesis which accounts for a small variation is equally good for one much larger, as will be seen in the next instance. Neither is any just inference to

be drawn from the slight change in the form of expression. We read that "Enos *lived* 90 years, and begat Cainan"; but of Noah that he "*was the son of* 500 years, and begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth." The one expression is in this connection the equivalent of the other, nor can the latter be fairly considered as at all more indefinite than the former. And even if any shadow of indefiniteness were to be attached to the expression itself, it is more than removed, in this instance, by the exceedingly distinct statements of the year, the month, and even the day of the month, in the seventh and eighth chapters. One other suggestion may possibly be made, both to this and the following instance, from the mention of three names in each case together, while in the rest of these genealogies only a single name is in each case given. It is sufficiently plain, however, that the omission of other names in the one case, and the insertion of them in the other, is only because of the less or greater importance to the narrative of the persons to whom those names belonged. The instance we have been considering would be precisely paralleled, if, in the case of Enoch, for example, it had been said, "Enoch lived 65 years, and begat Methuselah, Jabal, and Tubal" — provided those names occurred in the family. Had such been the statement, it is already apparent that Tubal might have been the one begotten at 65, Methuselah only some years later. But the recounting of so many names would have confused the narrative, without serving any good purpose, and they were therefore omitted; it still remaining possible, on the theory suggested, that Methuselah was actually born at a later period of Enoch's life.

At the close of the second genealogy (xi. 26) we are told, "Terah lived 70 years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran"; in vs. 32 it is said, "The days of Terah were 205 years; and Terah died in Haran." A very simple arithmetical calculation shows that, if we read the genealogy as it has been customary to read those of the fifth and eleventh chapters, Abram must then have been 135 years old; for $205 - 70 = 135$. Nevertheless, we know that this was not

the fact. We know it from the whole chronology of Abram's life, and especially from his age at the birth of Isaac; and we know it, also, from the statement in the same immediate connection (xii. 4), "Abram was 75 years old when he departed out of Haran"; the narrative implying — what Stephen expressly states (Acts vii. 4) — that Terah was then dead. Making the calculation again, therefore, upon this basis, we derive the age of Terah at Abram's birth by subtracting Abram's age at Terah's death from Terah's whole age: thus, $205 - 75 = 130$. Terah was, then, *at least* 130 at Abram's birth; he may have been still somewhat older, as we do not know how soon after his death Abram left Haran, and the age of 75 is given in reference to this last event. Here is a difference between the two calculations of 60 years. It cannot be supposed that Stephen made a mistake; for, independently of the difficulties attending such a supposition, the narrative in Genesis seems clearly to imply the same thing; and we have, too, precisely the same statement in Philo: "Abraham was, saith the Scripture, 75 years old when he went forth from Haran. . . . No reader of the Scriptures, I suppose, can be ignorant that Abraham, first having emigrated from the land of the Chaldees, dwelt in Haran. Whence also, *his father being then dead*, he departed."¹ It must be supposed that Philo and Stephen were both sufficiently familiar with the history of their nation not to make a blunder of 60 years in a point of such prime importance. When, therefore, it is said that Terah lived 70 years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran, it must be meant that he began to beget them at that age, although one of them at least — Abram — was, in fact, begotten some sixty years subsequently. Thus all difficulty and contradiction is removed. It is evident, from the address of Stephen and from Philo, that this was the common view of

¹ Ἀβραὰμ δὲ τῶν φησίν, ἐτῶν ἑβδομήκοντα πέντε, ὅτι ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ Χαρρᾶν. . . . οὐδένα τοίνυν τῶν ἐπιτετυχηκότων τοῖς νόμοις ἀγνοεῖν εἰκός, ὅτι πρότερον μὲν ἐκ τῆς Καλδαϊκῆς ἀναστὰς γῆς Ἀβραὰμ ᾤκησεν εἰς Χαρρᾶν· τελευτήσωντος δὲ αὐτοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖθε, καὶ ἐκ ταύτης μεταπίσταται.—Philo de Neigr. Abr. p. 324 F. G. ed. Colon. Allobr. 1613.

the matter among the Jews; and it is also plain that the same opinion was entertained by Josephus; for, by making Sarai the *niece* of Abram, while yet she was but ten years his junior (Gen. xvii. 17), he of course makes her father, Haran, a much older brother of Abram.¹ The critics, therefore, who find in this statement of Stephen a "demonstrable historical inaccuracy"² are wise above the record.

Applying these results to the genealogy before the flood, we find that in the same way that Terah is said to have begotten Abram at 70, while he actually did so at 130, and that Noah is said to have begotten Shem at 500, while his actual age was 502, any of the patriarchs named may have been begotten at any reasonable time in the life of their fathers subsequent to the date given for the beginning of paternity. Now, the sum total of all the ages of the patriarchs in the line as far as Noah is 7625 years; the sum total of all the ages before paternity is 1056; subtracting the latter sum from the former, we have 6569 years as the total lifetime of all the patriarchs after paternity began. Again, subtracting from this an arbitrary sum of, say 100 years for each of them except Enoch, as an old age in which they were not likely to have had children, we have a remainder of 5769 years. To this add the age of Adam before the birth of Seth (130 years), and the age of Noah at the flood (600 years), and the result is 6499 years, as the extreme possible limit of time between the creation and the deluge, according to the numbers of the Hebrew text. The inferior limit is, of course, that adopted in the common chronology, and obtained by adding to the sum of the ages before paternity the age of Noah at the flood, making, according to the Hebrew text, 1656 years. Between these limits, then, is 4843 years — by which length of time the chronology, on this theory, is uncertain and variable. In the absence of evidence, it might

¹ Josephus Antiq. lib. I. c. vi. § 5, p. 17, ed. Didot.

² Alford's Gr. Test. Proleg. (American ed.), chap. I. § vi. 18, p. 19. Much of the above argument may be found in Lee on the Inspiration of the Scriptures. Appendix H.

be considered probable that the true chronology would be a nearer approach to the smaller than the larger limit. The application of the same principles to the Samaritan text gives limits of 1307 years and 6360 years, with a variation of 5053 years—smaller numbers, but with a greater difference. The Septuagint chronology, which (except a variation of 124 years in the case of Lamech) gives the same total age of the patriarchs, but makes great changes in their age before paternity, admits in the same way of limits of 2242 years, on the one hand, and 5989, on the other; showing a difference of 3747 years. The Vulgate and Peschito-Syriac follow the Hebrew text.

Were the same principles applied also to the genealogy of the eleventh chapter, extending from Shem to Abram,—and we have seen that it actually must be applied here in at least one instance,—there would be a flexibility in the chronology of some 1500 to 2000 years; the inferior limit being, of course, what is called the received chronology.

The preceding observations have been made simply in view of the requirements of the scripture narrative itself, without regard to any external considerations. It may now be worth while to suggest very briefly one or two points in regard to their bearing upon other matters.

It cannot be said that there is yet any distinctly-settled scientific demand for an extension of the received chronology. We may set aside the claims of the school of Sir C. Lyell as at once too extravagant to be entertained, and too palpably contradicted whenever brought into contact with any accurate scientific determinations.¹ Apart from these, there is, un-

¹For instance, Sir C. Lyell in his work on the *Antiquity of Man* (chap. iii. p. 43, 2d Am. ed.), writes as follows: "I have shown in my *Travels in North America* that the deposits forming the delta and alluvial plain of the *Mississippi* consist of sedimentary matter, extending over an area of thirty thousand square miles, and known in some parts to be several hundred feet deep. Although we cannot estimate correctly how many years it may have required for the river to bring down from the upper country so large a quantity of earthy matter—the data for such a computation being as yet incomplete—we may still approximate to a minimum of the time which such an operation must have taken, by ascertaining experimentally the annual discharge of water by the *Mississippi*, and the

questionably a tendency to carry back the existence of the human race to a somewhat more remote period than had hitherto been supposed. As yet, this is only the *tendency* of discovery and investigation. Nothing very definite in regard to chronology can at present be considered as actually established. Yet with the existing tendency and its probable result, the advantage of possessing the chronological latitude here claimed is obvious.

A general survey of the relations of the divine operations to periods of time, however, especially commends the foregoing conclusions to our attention. These relations are the same in nature and in revelation. Alike in the one and the other, it is a marked feature that the earlier and less highly developed occupies the longer period; the later and higher, the shorter time. There seems to be in the Creator's works a sort of equation, into which quality and quantity—the latter represented either by number or by duration—enter as factors. The one is usually in the inverse ratio of the other. In geology, “the Palaeozoic ages were greatly prolonged in comparison with the Mesozoic, and these, again, in comparison with the Cenozoic, and so of their subdivisions.

mean annual amount of solid matter contained in its waters. The lowest estimate of the time required would lead us to assign a high antiquity, amounting to many tens of thousands of years (probably more than one hundred thousand), to the existing delta.” Now it happens that this subject has been investigated with great thoroughness and accuracy for utilitarian purposes by the United States Government. In the very valuable and thoroughly scientific report to that Government, Messrs. Humphreys and Abbott say (p. 435): “If it be assumed that the rate of progress has been uniform to the present day—and there are some considerations connected with the manner in which the river pushes the bar into the Gulf each year, which tend to establish the correctness of that opinion—the number of years which have elapsed since the River began to advance into the Gulf can be computed. The present rate of progress of the month may be obtained by a careful comparison of the progress of all the mouths of the river, as shown by the Maps of Captain Talcott, United States Engineer, 1838, and of the United States Coast Survey in 1851—the only maps that admit of such a comparison. They give two hundred and sixty-two feet for the mean yearly advance of all the passes. This mean advance of all the passes represents correctly the advance of the river. . . . Adopting this rate of progress (two hundred and sixty-two feet per annum), four thousand four hundred years have elapsed since the river began to advance into the gulf.”

The Lower Silurian era was four or five times as long as the Upper, and the duration of the Silurian era was three or four times that of either the Devonian or the Carboniferous. The earth thus dragged slowly on through its earliest periods." ¹ In astronomy, if the nebulous theory be admitted, the earlier stages in the formation of systems and of planets must have been inconceivably protracted, while subsequent results followed with a constantly accelerated speed of progress. In physiology, the multiplication of genera and species in the lower orders stands in marked contrast with their decreasing numbers as we rise in the scale of life. So marked is this feature of the animal economy as to have furnished a powerful argument for the unity of the human race. In the chemistry of life, the higher the organization, the more unstable the equilibrium; the vitality of the animal is far more easily suspended than of the vegetable; the mollusks and radiates are more tenacious of life than the vertebrates. Illustrations need not be multiplied. The general fact is obvious to the most casual observer of nature, and the profoundest investigations do but add to the assurance of its truth. Like speed and power in mechanics, duration and elevation, persistency and activity, are everywhere seen to be complementary terms. As the one increases, the other decreases.

Even with the received chronology, we trace in the scriptural history the same principle in the ordering of the spiritual world; but it becomes far more marked, and its analogy with nature more apparent, with the proposed extension of the earlier ages. As it is, we have two great periods, the one preceding, the other following the manifestation of the Son of God. In the latter, spiritual knowledge rises far higher, and spiritual life is greatly quickened and concentrated. The minimum endurance of the former was above 4000 years; on this hypothesis it may have been nearer 10,000 years. The latter, at the end of less than 2000, is already, by common consent, approximating its close.

¹ Dana's Manual of Geology, Part III. iv. 1. 4, p. 386.

Again, according to the received chronology, sixteen or seventeen centuries rolled away before the flood, and so slow was the movement then of humanity in its higher developments that the life even of individuals covered half the period; to this 400 years more must be added before the call of Abraham; and then still 400 more to the gathering of the Israelites around Mount Sinai. There is thus a period before the establishment of the old covenant of at least 2500 years in preparation for a dispensation which when established was itself to endure but 1500. But all this becomes far more marked, the law which we even now recognize far more clear, by the extension of the earlier periods. This law might be further illustrated by comparing the periods of prophecy with those of history; of the type with those of the antitype; or, in any other way, those of the less enlightened, less glorious, less spiritual, less elevated, with those of the higher, the nobler, the better. By all we are warned that "the time of our salvation draweth nigh"; "the night is far spent, the day is at hand." Our lot is cast in times when the movement of spirit is quick, active, and vigorous; and our lives, if they are to tell to any good purpose, must be earnest.