

# The biblical calendar of history

*Scripture texts are from the King James Version of the Bible*

## The Clue Phrase "Called His Name"

In Genesis 4 and 5, we read of the birth of Enosh to Seth. Why did God use different language to describe this event in Genesis 4 from that in Genesis 5? In Genesis 4:26, "And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos." [Note: All Scripture references are from the King James Bible.] But the Bible says in Genesis 5:6, "And Seth lived an hundred and five years, and begat Enos." Why did God use the phrase "called his name" in connection with the birth of Enos in Genesis 4 but not in Genesis 5? It is obvious that the phrases "[Seth] begat Enos" or "Methuselah begat Lamech" did not ensure that Enos was the immediate son of Seth or Lamech of Methuselah. Many instances can be found where a father-son relationship appears to be indicated and yet other Scriptural evidence points to a more distant ancestry. Matthew 1:1, where Jesus is referred to as the Son of David, and David, the son of Abraham, is illustrative.

A more careful examination of the Scriptures reveals why the phrase "called his name" which is the Hebrew qara, was used. In every place where this phrase is employed, there can be no doubt of the existing relationship; invariably it is indicative of parent and child. Thus, the Bible says, for example, in Genesis 21:3,

"Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sara Bare to him, Isaac."

We read in Genesis 25:25, "And they called his name Esau," and Isaiah 7:14, Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." In every instance where this "clue" phrase appears, one can be certain that an immediate son is being described and not a more remote descendant.

Thus, God's use of the "clue" phrase assures us that Seth was the immediate son of Adam (Gen. 4:25), Enos of Seth (Gen. 4:26), and Noah of his father, Lamech (Gen. 5:26-29). What about the rest of the names appearing in these genealogies under discussion? Two are decipherable. Other Biblical evidence shows clearly that Shem was the immediate son of Noah, even though the phrase "called his name" is not used.<sup>1</sup> The Bible shows, too, by other information that when Terah was 130 he became the father of Abram.<sup>2</sup> But in the case of all the other names listed in these chapters, there is no Biblical evidence of any kind that points to an inter-mediate father-son relationship. In fact, there is internal evidence within these accounts that points to other than immediate father-son relationships.<sup>3</sup>

## An Ancient Calendar

In further reflection upon this situation, two Biblical notices should be examined. The first is that of Genesis 7 and 8, where the date of the flood events are referenced to the age of Noah. Genesis 8:13 records:

And it came to pass in the six hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth.

Genesis 7:6 tells us:

Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth.

Could the calendars of ancient peoples have been tied to the life spans of certain individuals?

The second notice is that of the New Testament where Christ declares in Matthew 24:34:

This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

In this reference, Christ is speaking of events that will take place just before His return. He is, therefore, insisting that "this generation" will continue for at least almost two thousand years, for this

much time has now elapsed, and all the events of which He prophesied in Matthew 24 have not yet happened. As a matter of fact, this is the generation of Jesus Christ. For instance, the year A.D. 1999 is the year of our Lord.<sup>4</sup> The events of today are dated exactly as they were in Noah's day, by reference to the birth date of a person.

Since this method of dating events was practiced in Noah's day, was suggested by Jesus Himself, and is actually the practice used today, could not this have been the method described in Genesis 5 and 11? Is it not possible that these accounts are a calendar which gives the name of the patriarch whose life span was the reference point of his period or generation in history? This would make abundant sense because it provides continuity and clarity in historical reckoning.

### Calendar Confirmation from Egypt

God gives additional evidence to support this reasoning. In Exodus 6, God gives genealogical information concerning some of the descendants of Jacob. The information given does not appear very meaningful to our present day and age, but hidden among these verses are three numbers. The first is found in verse 16 where it is stated that Levi's three sons were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, and the years of Levi's life were 137. The second is in verse 18, where it says Kohath's four sons were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, and the years of Kohath's life were 133. The third is in verse 20, where it says Amram was married to Jochebed, and she bore him Moses and Aaron, and the years of Amram's life were 137. At first reading it appears that Levi was the great-grandfather, Kohath the grandfather, Amram the father, and Moses and Aaron the sons. But is this so? No other Biblical evidence indicates that this is the case, and there is no use anywhere in the Bible of the phrase "called his name" in reference to these men that would point to an immediate father-son relationship. Why would God give the life spans of only three individuals among so many?

To solve this puzzle, let us assume that God is giving us the calendar for the Israelitish sojourn in Egypt. One might recall that Jacob came to Egypt with his sons, including Levi, and that the Israelites went out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Both Levi and Aaron are mentioned in Exodus 6 and the age of Aaron at the same time of Israel's departure from Egypt is given as 83 (Exo. 7:7). It can be shown from the Biblical references that when Levi entered Egypt he was 60 to 63 years of age, with the burden of the evidence pointing to 60 years.<sup>5</sup> Since he died at the age of 137, he lived 77 years in Egypt. If this is a calendar giving the names of the reference patriarchs or generations, we would expect that Kohath was a descendant of Levi and was born in the year of Levi's death; and that Amram was a descendant of Kohath, and that he was born the year of Kohath's death. Aaron in turn was born the year of Amram's death, and was descended from Amram.

Levi

77 years in Egypt

Kohath

133 years in Egypt

Amram

137 years in Egypt

Aaron

83 years in Egypt

430 years total time

Turning now to the Biblical record, we discover the following interesting information in **Exodus 12:40-41**:

Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.

Thus, God shows us clearly that the calendar used to record the passage of time during the Egyptian sojourn was based on the lives of Levi and his descendants, Kohath, Amram, and Aaron. This also explains the prophecy given to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-16, that his descendants would be oppressed 400 years (they were not oppressed during the beginning of their sojourn), in a land that was not theirs, and that they would return to their own land in the fourth generation.

### Aaron's was the Fourth Generation

I believe that God in His wonderful wisdom has given us the key that unlocks the hitherto perplexing genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11. These chapters are a calendar. The time was divided into patriarchal periods or generations, even as the New Testament period is the generation of Jesus Christ, and as the Egyptian sojourn was divided. Thus, for example, when Methuselah died, bringing to an end his generation, a man who was born in the year of Methuselah's death was selected to be the next reigning patriarch, or at least the next man for calendar reference. After Methuselah, this was Lamech. None of

the conditions of his selection are given, except that he had to be a descendant of Methuselah. The Bible indicates that Methuselah was 187 years old when he begat Lamech; i.e., when he was 187, the forefather of Lamech was born to Methuselah (Gen. 5:25). This notice establishes the certainty of Lamech's blood descent from Methuselah by showing where his forefather tied into the life of Methuselah.

The selection of the next patriarch had to include a birth date coinciding with Methuselah's death date to ensure a rational history. Had he been born one or more years earlier, an overlap would have occurred that would have blurred history. If Lamech had been born one or more years later than Methuselah's death, a gap would have occurred that would have confused history. Therefore, when a citizen of the world of that day spoke of an event occurring in the year Methuselah 950, only one year in history coincided with that date. Again, if he spoke of the year Lamech 2, only one year coincided with that date, and he knew precisely how many years transpired from Methuselah 950 to Lamech 2.

At the beginning, men were comparatively scarce. Thus, it seems apparent that when Adam died, no one was born that year who qualified to become the next reference patriarch. When Seth died 112 years later, the same situation prevailed. But when Enosh, grandson of Adam, died 98 years after Seth, a child who was a descendant of Enosh was born in the same year, and this child was eventually named as the next reference patriarch. This was Kenan. Kenan's life span thus became the calendar reference for that period of history. The calendar was continued in this fashion until Methuselah died and Lamech was born.

When Lamech was born, he became the one to whom the calendar was referenced. His descendant, who was born the year of Lamech's death and who would have become the next patriarch, died in the flood. This can be known easily, for Lamech died five years before the flood and only Noah and his immediate family survived the flood. Noah, who was an immediate son of Lamech, of necessity became a substitute calendar reference, even though he was not born the year of Lamech's death. Thus, the flood events are all dated by the life span of Noah (Gen. 7:6, 7:11, 8:4-5, 8:13-14).

When Noah died 350 years after the flood, the same situation prevailed that existed when Adam died. Few people lived upon the earth, and no one met the conditions required to become the next reference patriarch. When Shem died 152 years after Noah, the child Arpachshad, a descendant of Shem, was born in the same year, and he became the next patriarch. The calendar was then continued in this same fashion until Terah was born.

After Terah was born, he became the reference patriarch. During Terah's life span, God brought into being the nation of Israel through Terah's immediate son, Abram. Thus, the descendant of Terah who was born the year of Terah's death was outside the Messianic line and outside of God's chronological purposes. God effectively had narrowed men down to the family of Abram. The normal method of calendar keeping was set aside in the absence of patriarchs who qualified. When Abraham died, no descendant of his was born the year of his death. When Isaac, the immediate son of Abraham, died, the same situation prevailed. This was repeated when Jacob, the immediate son of Jacob died, a descendant of Levi was born whose name was Kohath, and he apparently met the qualifications of a reference patriarch. Thus, he continued the calendar line as we have seen. Amram followed Kohath, and Aaron followed Amram. Interestingly, it can be shown that in a real sense Aaron's generation continued until Christ's began almost 2,000 years ago.<sup>6</sup> Thus, God has given in His Word a complete calendar from creation to Christ.

A chronology beginning with Adam may now be set forth. To tie this genealogical table to our present calendar, synchronization between the Biblical and secular histories should be found. Because so much work has been done in recent years, particularly in relation to the dating of the kings of Israel, this can be done rather readily. Edwin R. Thiele, in his book *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, established the date of the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdom as 931 B.C. <sup>7</sup> Since Solomon reigned 40 years (I Kings 11:42) and began to build the temple in the fourth year of his reign (I Kings 6:1), the construction began in the year 967 B.C. This date in turn can be related to the Exodus because in at least two places God gives a time bride from the Exodus to the building of the temple. The first is recorded in I Kings 6:1, where 480 years is indicated as the time span between these events. The second can be shown from the chronology of the Hebrew judges.<sup>8</sup> A time span of 480 years brings us to 1447 B.C. as the date of the Exodus. If we work back from this date to Adam, we arrive at the date for Adam as 11013 B.C.

The key dates are as follows:

Creation of Adam  
11013 B.C.  
Seth born  
10883 B.C.  
Enosh's generation  
10778-9873 B.C.  
Kenan's generation  
9873-8963 B.C.

Mahalel's generation  
8963-8068 B.C.  
Jared's generation  
8068-7106 B.C.  
Enoch's generation  
7106-6741 B.C.  
Methuselah's generation  
6741-5722 B.C.  
Lamech born  
5772 B.C.  
Noah born  
5590 B.C.  
Flood  
4990-4989 B.C.  
Arpachshad's generation  
4488-4050 B.C.  
Shelah's generation  
4050-3617 B.C.  
Eber's generation  
3617-3153 B.C.  
Peleg's generation  
3153-2914 B.C.  
Reu's generation  
2914-2675 B.C.  
Serug's generation  
2675-2445 B.C.  
Nahor's generation  
2445-2297 B.C.  
Terah born  
2297 B.C.  
Abram born  
2167 B.C.  
Isaac born  
2068 B.C.  
Jacob born  
2007 B.C.  
Entrance into Egypt  
1877 B.C.  
Exodus  
1447 B.C.  
Foundation of temple laid  
967 B.C.  
Division of kingdom  
931 B.C.  
The First Civilization

The development of a Biblical chronology beginning with Adam is interesting, but will it hold up when compared with the known facts of secular history? To ascertain this, the earliest civilization of antiquity will be examined to determine its localization and the time of its emergence.

The threshold of history appears to be located in the area of the present-day nation of Iraq.

Albright writes:

Archaeological research has established that there is no focus of civilization in the earth that can begin to compete in antiquity and activity with the basin of the Eastern Mediterranean and the region immediately to the east of it . . . The Obeidan is the earliest clearly defined culture of Babylonia, where we find its remains underlying nearly all the oldest cities of the country, such as Ur, Erech, Lagash, Eridu, etc. This proves that the occupation of the marshlands of Babylonia by human settlers came rather late in history of the irrigation culture, probably not far from 3700 B.C.

Thus, the archaeological evidence shows that the location of the first civilization after the flood was in the Mesopotamia Valley, and this agrees exactly with the Bible, for it reports the first cities were Babylon, Erech, Nineveh, etc. (Gen. 10:10-11).

The date 3700 B.C. suggested by Albright is apparently satisfactory to most archeologists. M.B. Rowton writes that in Uruk, one of the most ancient Mesopotamia sites, the earliest level of monumental buildings is that of the level known as Uruk V. He concludes, "the beginning of Uruk V can plausibly be

dated 3500 B.C." The date 3500 or 3700 B.C. are estimates arrived at by starting at a more clearly defined historical point and allowing a reasonable period of time for each level of occupation prior to this. Thus, the archaeological evidence appears to indicate that prior to about 3700 B.C., there was no substantial culture anywhere in the world. About 3700-3500 B.C. the first great civilization began to be formed in the plains of Sumer in the land of Babylon, Erech, Ur, etc.

How does this time compare with the Biblical chronology? In Genesis 10 the notice is given that the first building activity after the flood is that of Nimrod, the beginning of whose kingdom was Babel, Erech, and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar (Gen 10:10). When did Nimrod come upon the scene? His genealogical descent is that of Noah, Ham, Cush, Nimrod (Gen. 10:1, 6, 8). The Bible offers no timetable for this side of the family tree, but it does offer precise information regarding the genealogical statements of the Bible, it might be noted that very often two branches of the tree are offered. One is that of the descendants leading eventually to Christ and about which precise timetables are given, as we have seen. The second is the genealogical descent of that side of the family which turned away from God. It can be shown that the timetable of these two lines run roughly parallel.

It may be assumed that Ham and Shem were contemporaries (they obviously were, inasmuch as they were brothers), that Arpachshad and Cush were nearly contemporaries, and that Shelah and Nimrod were probably men of the same period of history. Thus, if Shelah's date is known, it may be surmised that Nimrod's was close to the same date.

Shelah's date by Biblical reckoning was 4050 B.C. to 3617 B.C. Nimrod must have lived about this time. Thus, the Bible suggests a date of about 3900 B.C. to 3617 B.C. for the founding of the great cities of the Mesopotamia Valley. The date suggested by the evidence of archaeology (3700-3500 B.C.) accords very well with the Biblical statement.

It is more than passing interest in this connection that the name "Nimrod" has left its mark on the Mesopotamia Valley. The great archaeologist George Rawlinson writes:<sup>12</sup> The remarkable ruin generally called Akkerhuf, which lies a little to the southwest of Baghdad, is known to many as the "Tel-Nimrod;" the great dam across the Tigris below Mosul is the "Suhr-el-Nimrud;" one of the chief of the buried cities in the same neighborhood is called "Nimrud" simply; and the name of "Birs-Nimrud" attaches to the grandest mass of ruins in the lower country.

### The Confusion of Tongues

Another piece of history that should be interesting to investigate is the Tower of Babel. Is there any secular evidence that relates to the account of the confusion of tongues as set forth in Genesis 11? There is, indeed.

The Genesis 11 account indicates that prior to this time in history, all men spoke one language. Moreover, the leading civilization was that of the people who dwelt in the plains of Shinar or Sumer. Their desire to be the one great civilization of the world prompted the building of the tower, which in turn brought God's interference with their plans so that they were forced to separate into various nations.

As has already been shown, the first great civilization of the world as revealed by secular evidence was that which sprang forth in the Mesopotamia Valley. The time of the beginning of the second important civilization of antiquity could be of real significance. Presumably, it would have begun shortly after the Tower of Babel. The events concerning the Tower of Babel are known to have occurred during the generation of Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided (Gen. 10:25). Peleg's generation was from 3153 B.C. to 2914 B.C. Therefore, one would expect no important civilizations other than Babylonia to have an antiquity greater than about 3150 B.C.

### Egypt Becomes a Great Civilization

All archaeological evidence points to Egypt as the second great civilization to appear. While there was a primitive culture in Egypt prior to the First Dynasty, the uniting of all of Egypt under the Pharaoh Menes to form the First Dynasty was the signal for a major burst in the arts of civilization. Albright writes:<sup>13</sup>

It is now certain that the level of Egyptian culture remained considerably below that of Mesopotamia until the first Dynasty, when under strong indirect influence from the Euphrates Valley, it forged ahead of the latter in a breathtaking spurt.

Interestingly, the new civilization of Egypt beginning with the First Dynasty was patterned after the Babylonian (Mesopotamian) culture. Albright continues:<sup>14</sup>

The close of the Predynastic Age and the beginning of the Thinite (period of first two centuries) Period

witnessed a sudden burst in the arts of civilization. This seems to have been connected in some way with an increase of cultural influence from Asia, since there are numerous exact parallels between Mesopotamia and Egyptian culture at this time, the former being demonstrably older and more original in nearly every instance.

The date of the beginning of the First Dynasty under Menes is calculated to be somewhere between 2800 B.C. and 3100 B.C. The early archaeologists such as Breasted dated his reign at about 3400 B.C. As new archaeological evidence was uncovered, this date was moved forward to about 3000 B.C. Albright believe 2850 B.C. is a good estimate.<sup>15</sup> William C. Hayes suggests 3100 B.C. is the best date presently available.<sup>16</sup>

Considering the above information, one is struck by the fact that prior to about 3100 B.C. to 2850 B.C., only one civilization of consequence existed in the world. That was the nation of Babylonia on the plains of Shinar. Then at that time, in a sudden burst of progress, Egypt grew to become a second great civilization, a civilization patterned after the first. These dates are in almost exact agreement with the Biblical date for the Tower of Babel. Surely the confusion of tongues as recorded in Genesis 11 sent thousands of people skilled in all the arts and crafts of Mesopotamia to Egypt and elsewhere. Thus, accord can be seen between the sacred and the secular records by this indirect evidence of the timetable of the civilizations of antiquity.

### Writing and the Tower of Babel

It might be noted that writing had its beginning in Mesopotamia and may be related to the confusion of tongues. Sir Leonard Wooley writes:<sup>17</sup>

All the archaeological evidence seems to prove that true writing was first developed in southern Mesopotamia.

The timing for this event is given as 3500 B.C. to 3000 B.C. Gelb concludes:<sup>18</sup>

The date of the earliest Sumerian writing should be set tentatively at about 3100 B.C.

The confusion of tongues in Sumer some time in the period between 3150-2900 B.C. could have been the catalyst that produced writing. Before this dramatic civilization-splitting event, all was secure. Only one language was spoken in all the world. Verbal communication was adequate and dependable. But then came the fearful event that shook the very foundations of this great civilization; and men could no longer understand each other. They wanted to find a better way. The application of the spoken word to clay tablets would provide insurance that this kind of happening would never again totally destroy a culture. The clay tablets would prove to be a reference point. One surely can see the possibility if not the probability of this connection between writing and the Tower of Babel.

### Conclusion

Thus, we see that the chronology of history established by Biblical reckoning agrees rather satisfactorily with the archaeological evidence of the earliest civilizations. The Biblical timetable is, of course, the most reliable, for it is God's Word. If we have properly interpreted it, it should make possible a far more definitive analysis of the secular evidence than ever before. It should also provide a dependable framework in which to understand dating evidence such as that offered by radiometric isotopes like carbon 14.

Hopefully, a perspective of history has been set forth that shows that answers are potentially forthcoming when we begin with the Biblical framework. The concept of a 13,000-year-old world, which began to be repopulated after the flood some 7,000 years ago, and which 1,500 years later had grown to a point that allowed the spawning of the first great cities, surely makes much more sense than the idea that mankind has been around for hundreds or even thousands of millennia, and then became a cohesive city civilization only in the last 5,500 years. Furthermore, the apparent possibility of the end of the age occurring in our time also accords far better with the shorter timetable.

The first purpose of the Bible is not to be a textbook of science or history. It is fundamentally a presentation of God's grace revealed through Jesus Christ. But when the Bible does speak in any field of learning, it does so with great care, accuracy, and authority. Three reasons might be advanced for this: (1) these subjects are often an integral part of the plan of salvation; (2) they are part of God's message to man; and (3) by reason of His very nature, God is accurate when He speaks. Therefore, the Bible has much more to offer than many has supposed. I hope that others will be encouraged to build upon the suggestions offered in this presentation.

**To Him be all glory and power and praise. Amen.**

