

BIBLICAL CHRONOLOGY

Vol. II, No. 5

©James B. Jordan, 1990

May, 1990

THE ARPHAXAD CONNECTION

We have seen that the Bible provides a chronology from creation to the Flood in Genesis 5, and that contrary to the opinions of some, that chronology is seamless. (For more argumentation, see James B. Jordan, "The Biblical Chronology Question: An Analysis," available for \$3.00 from Biblical Horizons, Box 132011, Tyler, TX 75713.) With the close of the first patriarchal era, however, we come to a break in the chronology. The Bible provides information to cross the break caused by the Flood, but we must compare Scripture with Scripture to figure it out.

The fact of this break is of theological significance, in separating the pre-Flood patriarchal era from the post-Flood era. A similar break in connection with the birth of Abram separates the second (post-Flood) patriarchal era from the third (Hebrew) Matriarchal era. We shall find similar chronological breaks at the time of Moses, David, the Restoration, and Jesus. Each new covenant is marked by a chronological break and a new beginning, though in each case it is possible to figure out the overall chronology from Scriptural data.

Arphaxad

The Flood occurred 1656 years after the creation of the world, according to Genesis 5. That means that Noah opened the Ark and came out in year 1657 Anno Mundi ("Year of the World," AM 1657).

Genesis 5:32 says that "Noah was 500 years old, and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth." If we did not know better, we should think that Shem was the eldest, and Japheth the youngest. In fact, however, Genesis 10:21 says that Japheth was the oldest, while Genesis 9:24 says that Ham was the youngest. The reason Shem is listed first is that it is he who will carry the redemptive seed and maintain the patriarchal genealogy and chronology.

Genesis 11:10 says that "Shem was 100 years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the Flood." This means that Shem was born when Noah was 502, two years after Japheth was born. This is the standard interpretation, and it assumes that "two years after the Flood" means two years after the year in which the Flood began and completely took place (Gen. 8:13). This puts the birth of Arphaxad at AM 1658.

The only author I've come across who takes the date as AM 1659 is Alonzo T. Jones, *Chronology* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Pub., 1887). He assumes that "two years after the Flood" means two years after it ended, assuming that it ended when Noah left the Ark, not when the waters were all gone. This is an unnatural reading of the text, however. We should expect the text to say "two years after the Flood ended," or "two years

on the seventh month of that year (Gen. 7:24;8:4). Noah did not come out of the Ark until the second month of AM 1657, but the Flood was long over by that time: The waters were dried up by the first day of AM 1657 (Gen. 8:15). Thus, "two years after the Flood" must mean two years after AM 1656, which means Arphaxad was born in AM 1658.

This raises an interesting question: Why didn't Noah leave the Ark when the land was dry? Why did God have him wait until the 27th day of the second month (Gen. 8:14ff.)? Possibly in order to make up a full year of 365 days in the Ark.

Practically speaking, the extra 47 days allowed the earth to bring forth vegetation to feed Noah and the animals. Although Noah was told to take food on the Ark (Gen. 6:21), it is hard to believe that he had a whole year's worth for himself and his family (though maybe he did). Given the miraculous character of the Flood Year, and the parallels between the Flood and the Exodus later on, some have suggested that God gave manna to Noah and the animals on the Ark, or that the food was miraculously multiplied for them in the way Elijah, Elisha, and Jesus later multiplied food. The day Israel entered Canaan, the manna stopped (Josh. 5:12). Similarly, I imagine the day Noah left the Ark, his provisions (of whatever sort) were exhausted.

At any rate, the Flood itself did not extend into the second year, so that "two years after the Flood" means two years after AM 1656, or AM 1658.

A Fantastic Interpretation

Oliver Blosser and E. W. Faulstich of the Chronology-History Research Institute maintain that Arphaxad was born in AM 1660, four years after the Flood. Blosser explains: "The Genesis Flood lasted for one year and ten days according to the numeric data related to this Great Deluge written in Genesis 7 and 8. The total time span involved here is three years and ten days. However, since Hebrew reasoning considered a part to be a whole; this timescale would be equal to 'four years'" (Blosser, "Historical Reliability of Genesis 1-11, Part 3, *It's Time* [June, 1968], p. 6.).

Blosser's position is wholly implausible. If we assume that Arphaxad's birth "two years after the Flood" means two years after the Flood Year (not the actual Flood) ended, we come to the 27th day of the 2d month of AM 1659. Blosser is asserting that "two years after the Flood" means that both of the years during part of which Noah was in the Ark are counted as full Flood years, and that Arphaxad was born two full years later. In other words, "two years after the Flood" means "two full years after the end of the year in which the Flood ended."

Lud, and Aram." From this he draws the conclusion that Arphaxad was Shem's third son. In order to allow time for the births of Elam and Asshur, he adopts Blosser's misreading of Genesis 11:10. (E. W. Faulstich, *The 'Plan'* [Spencer, 1A: Chronology Books, 1988], p. 6.)

What shall we say to this? First, if Faulstich is right and Arphaxad is the third son, then perhaps the first two were born before the Flood, but not being adults (Num. 1 :3) were not mentioned by name as being on the Ark. Since women nursed for two or more years in the ancient world, and breastfeeding usually acts to prevent conception, it is very unlikely that Mrs. Shem could have had three children between AM 1656 and 1660. Thus, if Elam and Asshur were older than Arphaxad, they were born before the Flood, and there is no problem with reading Genesis 11:10 in the normal way, that Arphaxad was born two years after the Flood, in AM 1658.

Second, however, it is far more likely that Genesis 10:22 is not listing the sons in birth order, but rather in a **chiasm**, a literary device in which the central item is the most important, a device in which the Scriptures abound. The central of the five sons is Arphaxad, and it is he through whom the seed line is to be traced. We have already seen that the sons of Noah are not listed in birth order. We shall see that the sons of Terah are not listed in birth order either. In 1 Chronicles 1:28, we read of "the sons of Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael," even through Ishmael was the elder.

Thus, there is no support for Blosser and Faulstich's forced interpretation of Genesis 11:10. It is clear that Arphaxad was born two years after the Flood Year, in AM 1658. Most likely, Elam and Asshur were younger than Arphaxad. If they were older, they were born before the Flood.

Schematizes

One of the problems we run into as we investigate Biblical chronology is the fact that many who have gone before us have abused the text in order to bring it into line with numerological prophetic schemes. It is a fact that God has organized the world and history in such a way that sometimes numerological features of a marvelous sort come to light. The census figures of Numbers 1 and 26, for instance, contain very interesting numerical correspondences to various astral cycles, seemingly to indicate that God's people are His stars, His heavenly host. These same numbers appear in Genesis 5, evidently for the same purpose. (On astral numbers, see James B. Jordan,

View [Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1988], p. 58; M. Barnouin, "The Censuses of the Book of Numbers," available for \$6.00 postpaid from Biblical Horizons, Box 132011, Tyler, TX 75713; and Gordon Wenham, 1-15 [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987], pp. 133f.)

Similarly, we are told that Israel was under Egyptian domination for 430 years (Ex. 12:40). Ezekiel uses the number 430 to characterize the years of Judah's and Israel's iniquity (Ezk. 4:5-6). Careful (non-schematizing) chronologists such as Anstay argue that the years of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah show these numbers (though this is disputed). Whatever the case, with information like this staring us in the face, we cannot dismiss out of hand the possibility of complex numerological features to Old Testament chronology.

At the same time, there is a great temptation to oversimplify the cycles of time in order to come up with neat

As I have
"When God set up the world, He made it complex. The fact that the world is unified, and can be understood, testifies to the Oneness of its Creator; but the fact that the world contains many different separate and irreducible elements testifies to the Threeness of its Creator. Sinful man, however, does not like to have to live in a world that is too broad and complex for him to master intellectually. Man wishes to reduce the complexity as much as possible, so that he can rationally grasp it as a whole. Thus, rationalism as a sinful tendency in mankind always involves reductionism as a methodology." (Jordan, the from Biblical Horizons, Box 132011, Tyler, TX 75713; p. 70.)

There are four irreducible cycles that mark time in the Bible: days, weeks, months, and years. The week of seven days does not divide into a year of 365 days, or into a month of 29-30 days. Months of 29.53 days don't work with 24-hour days. A year of alternating 29 and 30 day months comes to 354 days, with eleven days left over.

"The Bible presents a solar day, a week of seven solar days, with a lunar month [lunar year begins in Spring], and a solar year [beginning in Fall]. Even in Biblical times, rationalistic groups were unwilling to live with this complexity; the divided the solar year into sections, so that months and weeks fit into prescribed slots. (The Book was a pseudepigraphical commentary on Genesis generated by one of the heretical sects within inter-testamental Judaism.)" p. 72).

While more careful chronologists (such as Anstay and Mauro) are not guilty of schematizing, there are several contemporary writers in the field who are. As we make these studies we shall find instances of Scripture twisting on the part of certain chronologists. The reason for this is that chronological study attracts a certain percentage of prophecy buffs and numerological addicts. Thus, a number of works in the area are written by people who are out to prove a 7000 scheme of history, and who are convinced that 1948 is an important prophetic year, and who are looking for repeated cycles of 430 years or 480 years, etc. The temptation is to twist the chronology to make it fit such schemes.

The Chronology-History Research Institute of E. W. Faulstich, for instance, operates with a 7000 year scheme of history that begins in 4001 B.C. and has the millennium beginning in AD 2000. Their charts include the founding of modern Israel and the 6-day war as important chronological and prophetic events. Faulstich's book

contains several pages of wholly speculative cycles of 980 years, 990 years, 1485 years, 480 years, 430 years, and so forth (pp. 17ff.). An examination of these patterns shows that they were extremely forced and devoid of Biblical foundation. For this reason the research of Faulstich and his associates, while sometimes useful, must always be questioned. The same kind of criticism has to be levelled against C. G. Ozanne's often useful book 7000 (Jericho, NY: Exposition Press, 1970).

As a rule of interpretation, we must take the data of Scripture in its simple and obvious sense, and develop a chronology from it. If when we are finished there are some patterns that emerge, well and good. Such patterns, however, must not be allowed to influence our interpretation of the text, however. The true pattern may be one that only God can see, and that we shall not be able to discern until we have new eyes in the age to come.