

BIBLICAL CHRONOLOGY

Vol. II, No. 6

©James B. Jordan, 1990

June, 1990

THE ABRAHAM CONNECTION

Last month we looked at the chronological break that comes at the time of the Flood, and we saw how the Bible crosses that break by telling us that, Arphaxad was born two years after the Flood. This time we look at a break that comes with the birth of Abram.

Genesis 11:26 says that Terah lived 70 years and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran. If we did not have other evidence to consider, we might think that Abram was the oldest of the three. Given the literary parallel between Genesis 5 and 11, however, we have to compare this to Genesis 5:32, which says that Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth. In both passages, we have a line of generations of single sons, followed by a generation in which three sons are listed (Adam to Noah, then 3 sons; Shem to Terah, then 3 sons).

We know from Genesis 11:10 that Shem was 100 years old two years after the Flood, which came in Noah's 600th year, so that Shem was obviously not the firstborn. He was born when Noah was 602, but as **patriarchy-bearer** he is listed first. By means of parallelism, we can suggest that of Terah's sons, Haran was the eldest, born when Terah was 70 years old, and Nahor the youngest. Haran died well before the other two sons did (**Gen. 12:28**).

Acts 7:4 tells us that Abram did not leave the city of Haran until Terah had died. Genesis 12:4 says that Abram was 75 at that time. Genesis 11:32 says that Terah died at 205. Thus, Abram was born when Terah was 130.

Chronologers who take this view include Bishop **Ussher**, Martin Anstey's standard work,

Old and **Philip Mauro's** modification of **Anstey**,

Commentators on Genesis who agree include John Calvin, Matthew Poole, Matthew Henry, George Bush, Adam Clarke, R. S. **Candlish**, J. G. Murphy, and recently Allen P. Ross.

Objections

Others disagree. Jewish commentators, of course, take no notice of Acts 7:4, and thus assume that Abram was the oldest of Terah's sons (e.g., **Umberto Cassuto**). Christian commentators have also objected to **Ussher's** view. These include Keil and **Delitzsch**, Payne Smith (in **Ellicott's** Commentary), H. C. Leupold, Henry Morris, Gordon **Wenham**, Derek Kidner, and G. Ch. Aalders. E. W. **Faulstich** also rejects **Ussher's** view.

Some have suggested that Terah was not dead when Abram left Haran, and that Acts 7:4 should be taken spiritually: Terah was dead to Abram. This is the view of Morris and Leupold.

Others want to skip out of the Hebrew text and go to the Samaritan **Pentateuch**, which says Terah died at 145.

is worse than the disease!

Another view is that the Hebrew text is correct, with Terah dying at 205, but that Stephen was (wrongly) using the **Samaritan figure** of 145, or else simply making a wrong deduction from the text. It is claimed that Luke is simply recording Stephen's speech, warts and all, and thus that Stephen's statement should not be used to explain the chronology. This is basically the view of Keil & **Delitzsch** and Aalders. Since Acts emphasizes repeatedly that Stephen was filled **with** the Spirit, it is extremely unlikely that the record of his speech contains factual errors (Acts 6:8, 10, 15; 7:55).

Curiously, **Wenham**, though writing within the **Calvinistic** tradition, takes no notice of the problem, though **Calvinistic** writers, beginning with Calvin himself, deal with it at length in their works, mentioned above. Neither he nor **Faulstich** provide any explanation for Acts 7:4.

Most of these commentators call attention to the fact that in Genesis 17:17, Abraham laughed and said, "Shall a child be born to a man who is 100 years old?" If Abraham had been born when Terah was 130, they ask, why would he have a problem believing in a birth at 100?

This won't hold up, however. Years later, Abraham married **Keturah** and had more sons. Clearly Abram's laughter in Genesis 17:17 is not related to any feeling of impotence, but to the humor in the situation: a childless man finally having a son at the age of 100, after trying for 75 or so years! Even today we see examples of men in their nineties marrying young women and begetting children. Thus, **Abram's** laughter cannot be related to sexual impotency or infertility on his part. His later marriage to **Keturah** shows that he had no problem with the idea of having children in his old age. Abraham laughed because he was happy.

One other argument occasionally made is that if Haran was born when Terah was 70, and Abram was born when he was 130, that means 60 years for only three sons. But who says these were all of Terah's children? Abram's wife **Sarai** was Terah's daughter by another wife (**Gen. 20:12**). He may have had 20 sons and 20 daughters, by several wives. The Bible mentions the three sons who were important, not all the sons there were.

Theological Arguments

We cannot permit literary parallels and theological analogies to carry the day, but since they are brought to the fore by certain writers, and are present in the text one way or another, we need to take notice of them.

Some schematizes will be tempted by a numerological consideration: If we assume Abram was born when Terah was 70, then the arrival of Abram in Canaan at 75 hap-

allow Acts 7:4 to carry the day.

A theological analogy that is important, I think, is the parallel between Abram's exodus from Ur and the exodus of Israel from Egypt. The Israelites left Egypt, but then remained in the wilderness for 40 years, because of unfaithfulness. Specifically, they remained in the wilderness until the older generation had died out (Num. 26:64-65). Parallel to this, Stephen tells us in Acts 7:2-3 that God appeared to Abram in Ur and told him to move to Canaan. Abram and his family got as far as Haran, but then stayed there until the older generation (**Terah**) had died. Then they moved on into Canaan. This moves against the notion that Abram left Haran before Terah died.

Ozanne's Obfuscation

C. G. Ozanne presents another literary analogy to support the idea that Abram remained in Haran for seven years after Terah died. The conclusion of his argument is that Abram was born when Terah was 137, or in AM 2015 instead of AM 2008. I want to look at Ozanne's argument because it is a good example of schematic reasoning; that is, twisting Scripture to support a numerological and prophetic scheme. (C. G. Ozanne, [Jericho, NY: Exposition Press, 1970], pp. 18-26.)

Ozanne starts by noticing that although there were ten patriarchs before the Flood, there were only seven who lived long enough to stand alone as the head of the line. Enoch was translated and Lamech died before the deaths of their fathers. Methuselah died in the Flood Year, so that Noah did not become an "inheritor" until the Flood.

Here is Ozanne's argument: "In the fact that there were seven antediluvian Inheritors lies the key to Abraham's dates. For it is a remarkable fact that the rulers of God's people in the Old Testament appear in multiples of seven. There were fourteen Judges, twenty-one Kings of Judah and twenty-one Kings of Israel. [Actually, it takes a bit of juggling to come up with these figures – JBJ.] It would seem therefore that there ought as well to be seven (or a multiple of seven) postdiluvian Inheritors. Yet if no interval is allowed between the death of Terah and the call of Abraham, there were only six. Noah was succeeded by Shem, Shem by Eber, Eber (who outlived Abraham by four years) by Isaac, Isaac by Jacob, and Jacob by Joseph. Apart from the obvious desirability that Abraham should not be excluded, the numerical consideration demands his inclusion, thus indicating an interval of at least five years between Terah's death and the call of Abraham."

"Interval" of at least five years? Come on! What you mean is a **GAP** of at least five years! (Hey, wow! Another gap!)

out stuffing any gap in the chronology. Observe: With the call of Abraham comes a new covenant. Thus, the post-Flood Inheritors are Noah, Shem, and Eber, while the **post-Abrahamic Inheritors** are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The fact that Eber overlaps Abraham does not matter because we have a new covenant intervening. By doing this I have done justice to Ozanne's (questionable) **heptameron** scheme, but without violating the chronology.

Ozanne doesn't stop here, however. Five years are the minimum he needs, but are they enough? It's always a problem with gap-stuffing: How long is the gap going to be? Maybe 30 years?

Sometimes it's tough being a gap-stuffer in today's world.

But Ozanne has a solution: "It is not difficult to discern that the exact duration of this period [from creation to the exodus] must have been 2520 years. This is the number of the and in this capacity it occurs twice again, once more in terms of years and once in terms of days." On the basis of this speculation, Ozanne fixes the **interval** between the death of Terah and the call of Abraham at seven years. We can stuff seven years into the gap. (Oh, wow! A seven-year **gap**!)

Now, what are these other two periods of 2520? The 2520 days is (you guessed it!) Daniel's Seventieth Week, which is two times 3¹/₂ years, or two times 42 months, assuming 30-day months (which is highly questionable). And of course, this seventieth week is in the future and will be a time when the Gentiles mess with Israel (**Ozanne**, p. 155). And the 2520 years? "Another period of 2520 years elapsed between the first year of Nebuchadnezzar (604 B. C.) and the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Turks in 1917" (**Ozanne**, p. 156). This is pretty wild stuff, especially since the first year of Nebuchadnezzar may well not have been anywhere close to 604 B.C. (see **Chronology**)

Though Ozanne's book contains much of merit, it is sadly marred by his attempt to date the second coming, and his attempts to force the Bible into a simplistic chronological scheme. His book (1970) dates the rapture and the beginning of the supposedly postponed 70th week of Daniel as 1989. Maybe he will revise his scheme now.

Conclusion

The Flood occurred in AM 1656. Two years later, Shem begat Arphaxad, in 1658. The genealogy of Genesis 11 brings us down to the birth of Terah in 1878. There can be little question but that Abraham was born **when Terah was 130, which puts the birth of Abram in AM 2008.**