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1994? — Not!

(Part 2)

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— (Continued from *Biblical Chronology* V:5. In his book 1994?, Harold Camping asserts that the life spans of the primeval patriarchs of Genesis 5 & 11 were actually epochs, one after another. This together with other mistakes in interpretation yields for him a creation date of 11013 B.C. We are in the midst of analyzing his hypothesis.)

Camping's Attempted Substantiation

Camping attempts to justify his hypothesis with several lines of argument, all of which are erroneous.

1. Gaps in Genealogies

He first mentions the fact that in some of the "beatitudes" of the Bible, generations are left out for some reason or other. Matthew 1:8 and 11, for instance, each skip a generation or two. Ruth 4:18-22 is incomplete. All very true, but none of these has a chronology attached. We can grant that there *might* be a generation missing in some places in Genesis 5 & 11, but we cannot grant Camping's epoch hypothesis because it has no Biblical foundation. Thus, "Mahalalel lived 65 years and begat Jared" could mean that Mahalalel begat Jared through an intermediate generation, but it clearly means that Jared came into the world when Mahalalel was 65 years old, not in the year Mahalalel died.

2. The Days of Peleg

Camping asserts that Peleg could not have been the son of Eber, as Genesis 10:25 and 11:16 seem to assert. This is because, says Camping, the text says that in the days of Peleg the earth was divided (referring to the tower of Babel). Now, Camping notes that on the classical interpretation Eber outlived Peleg, so that events during Peleg's life span should be said to take place during the overarching days of Eber. But this is to assume exactly what Camping must show, which is that "the days of so-and-so" refers to an epoch bounded by so-and-so's life span, and that such an epoch cannot overlap someone else's life span epoch. But where has Camping provided any evidence for this? Nowhere yet.

Why, then, does the text say that in the days of Peleg the earth was divided? Perhaps the tower of Babel incident happened about the time of Peleg's birth, but I don't think so. We are told that the clan of Joktan, Peleg's brother, moved to the east (Gen. 10:30). Four verses later we read that "as they journeyed east" they came to Shinar and built the tower of Babel. In context, it seems clear that it was the Joktanites

the Joktanites were in the priestly line of Shem (Gen. 9:26-27; 10:22ff.). Those who were supposed to lead in true worship became leaders of apostasy. Moreover, Genesis 10:6-8 may mean that Nimrod, founder of Babel, was the fourth generation from Ham, while Joktan was the fourth generation from Shem, making them contemporaries:

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Ham | Shem |
| Cush | Arpachshad |
| Raamah | Shelah |
| Sheba or Deden | Eber |
| Nimrod | Joktan |

Alternatively, Nimrod might have been a late son of the long-lived Cush, and thus a contemporary of Joktan. (If Cush were the same age as Arpachshad, he would have been 99 when Joktan was born, with probably 300+ years to go; thus if Cush begat Nimrod at the age of 99, Nimrod would have been the same age as Joktan.)

In terms of the theology of Genesis, the call of Abram occurs in the aftermath of the judgment on the nations at the tower of Babel. Israel becomes the microcosm of a new creation, with her seventy elders a microcosm of the seventy nations of the world in Genesis 10. Thus, it is possible that the scattering at Babel happened not too long before the call of Abram. On the other hand, since the Biblical principle is that people fall into sin immediately after they are granted a kingdom, it may be that the Joktanites led the nations of the world into sin sometime around the middle of Peleg's life. According to proper Biblical chronology, Peleg was born in A.M. 1757 and lived 239 years, to the year 1996. Abram was born in 2008.

The meaning of Genesis 10:25, then, is that sometime during Peleg's life the world was divided at Babel. Since Peleg's brother Joktan was involved in the apostasy at Babel, and it seems that his involvement came after he had begotten many sons, it is likely that the Babel incident happened in the middle or later part of Peleg's life. That is all that Genesis 10:25 means. It does not refer to an Epoch of Peleg, and has nothing to do with Camping's hypothesis.

3. The Cainan Question

Camping takes note of Luke 3:35-36, which inserts "Cainan" between Arpachshad and Shelah, seemingly contrary to Genesis 11:12-14. I discussed this in *Biblical*

added to Luke's genealogy by scribes trying to bring Luke into conformity with the errors of the Septuagint Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. There are other possible explanations as well, such as that Cainan really did live between these two men. The fact that Arpachshad was 35 when Shelah was born does not at all eliminate a generation in between. If Arpachshad was 17 when he begat Cainan, and Cainan was 18 when he begat Shelah, then Arpachshad "begat Shelah" when he was 35. One thing is for certain: Luke 3:35-36 provides no support for Camping's hypothesis.

I want to remind the reader that so far we have been given not one shred of substantiation for this notion that these life spans are calendars of epochs. Camping has provided not one iota of evidence for this assertion. He simply makes the assertion and then says that his view answers some apparent problems in the text. What we are seeing is that the traditional answers to these "problems" in the text are perfectly good and valid. What we want Camping to do is provide us some *positive* Biblical evidence that points in the direction of his hypothesis. So far he has not provided any.

4. The Years of Noah

Now Camping provides at last a positive argument. He says that when Genesis 8:13 says "in the 601st year, in the 1st month..." the reference is to the years of Noah's life span (true), but it does not say "in Noah's 601st year." Thus, the writer is using Noah's life span as a kind of calendar. This is the Epoch of Noah, and his 601st year is the 601st year.

Camping goes to Matthew 24:34 to substantiate his opinion. Jesus said that "this generation will not pass away until all these things are fulfilled." According to Camping this refers to the second coming, so that the "generation" refers to the Epoch of Christ. This interpretation is woefully wrong on two counts. First, the event referred to is the destruction of Jerusalem, which is clearly differentiated from the second coming in Matthew 24:36. Second, "generation" does not mean epoch. What Jesus meant was very simply this: The generation to which He was speaking would not have died off before Jerusalem was destroyed.

Now, based on this very slender evidence and an outright misinterpretation of Matthew 24:34, Camping runs straight back to his hypothesis: The life spans of the patriarchs are epochs and are to be stacked on top of one another (with a few exceptions).

But this just isn't valid. When we read the books of Kings and Chronicles we see that years are indeed counted from the accession year of a king. But we also see that there are sometimes co-regencies, when a son will reign with a father for a while. In such cases, either chronology can be used. It just depends on which king you are talking about. In other words, the reigns of the kings are indeed epochs, but *the epochs can overlap*.

Thus, Shem was 99 years old in Noah's 601st year (Gen. 11: 10). If the flood narrative had been written from Shem's perspective, Genesis 8:13 could have been written, "in the 99th year . . ." But the flood is not written from Shem's perspective but from Noah's. I don't mean Noah's personal perspective, but rather the meaning of "Noah, the Bringer of Rest and Comfort." The flood is tied to Noah in the way that the Temple is tied to Solomon ("Peace"). Naturally, then, the chronology is expressed in Noah's years.

So, sure: We can readily admit that ancient people may well have measured their years by the life spans of these patriarchs, but that does not mean that there was no overlap.

a positive argument yields no evidence at all for his position.

5. The Levite Line in Exodus 6

To try and back up his position, Camping turns next to Exodus 6. Camping's arguments here are so bizarre that I hesitate to entertain them, but for the sake of completeness (and to illustrate just how weird all this can become), I shall do so.

Exodus 6:16-20 says that Levi lived 137 years, Kohath lived 133 years, and Amram lived 137 years. This comes to 407 years. Camping assumes that each of these is an epoch, with no overlap. He then assumes that Aaron's is the next epoch-life span. Aaron was 83 at the time of the exodus, which when added to the preceding numbers means that Levi was born 490 years before the exodus.

Now, Camping wrongly assumes that the Hebrews lived in Goshen for 430 years. All Biblical chronologers know that this is an error. Galatians 3:17 says that the 430 years begins with the arrival of Abram in Egyptian jurisdiction in Genesis 12. Numbers 26:59 also disproves it. I have discussed the matter at length in *Biblical Chronology* 2:7.

But Camping says that the Hebrews were in Goshen for 430 years. This means, in his scheme, that Levi was born 60 years before the Hebrews entered Goshen. The descent happened when Joseph was 39 and Jacob was 130. Thus, Levi was born, says Camping, when Jacob was 70 years old.

But now Camping has another problem. Jacob went to Haran to marry and worked 7 years for Rachel; and then he had to work another 7 years because he was tricked; and then he worked 6 years. That comes to 20 years. It means he was married for 13 years when he left Haran. Joseph was born in the seventh year of the marriage, just before Jacob's last six years in Haran (Gen. 30:25ff.). Levi was Leah's third son and so would have been born, say, five years into the marriage. He would be about two years older than Joseph. But according to Camping Levi was 21 years older than Joseph (Levi was 60 when Joseph was 39). Thus, Camping now has to get more years for Jacob in Haran, and he tries to double the figure to get 40 instead of 20 years.

I'm going to disprove this reconstruction in detail to show how badly Camping has misinterpreted the data. I'm going to do this in order to show that this man, despite good intentions, is not a God-gifted exegete. He regularly misinterprets the text. Interpretation is definitely not his gift. His badly erroneous handling of the Old Testament chronology is multiplied when he gets to New Testament prophecy. Mr. Camping is apparently a good entrepreneur and radio host, and doubtless a fine Christian, but he does not have the training or the gifts to be an exegete of the Bible. His exegesis is a glaring example of gnat-straining and camel-swallowing.

To start with we can completely shoot down Camping's approach with one verse: Numbers 26:59. This verse says that "the name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, whom her mother bare to Levi in Egypt; and she bare unto Amrem Aaron and Moses, and Miriam their sister."

Let's start by taking this verse literally. Here is the reconstruction I provided in *Biblical Chronology* 2:7.

| | |
|---------|--|
| C. 2256 | Birth of Levi (Jacob's third son) |
| c. 2286 | Birth of Kohath (Levi is 30) |
| AM 2298 | Descent into Egypt |
| c. 2350 | Births of Amram (Kohath is 64) and Jochebed (Levi is 94) |

| | |
|---------|--|
| C. 2419 | Death of Kohath at 133 |
| AM 2433 | Birth of Moses (Amram and Jochebed are 83) |
| C. 2487 | Death of Amram at 137 |
| AM 2513 | Exodus |

We can play with these dates, but two things are clear about the Hebrews in Goshen: they lived long lives and they were very fruitful. The scheme I have proposed is completely within the parameters of the situation as described in the Bible.

Now let's interpret Numbers 26:59 in terms of Camping's hypothesis. The verse says that Jochebed was the immediate daughter of Levi, born after the descent into Egypt. She was married, however, to Amram. According to Camping, the entire Epoch of Kohath (133 years) intervenes between Jochebed's birth and that of her husband. This clearly is impossible, and Camping's scheme falls apart.

But Camping can reply by asserting that none of the relationships in this verse are immediate. Here is the required Camping paraphrase: "And Kohath begat someone who led to Amrem. And the name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of someone descended from Levi, whom her mother bore to some descendant of Levi in Egypt; and she bore Amram someone who led to Aaron and Moses, and Miriam their sister."

Now I put it to you: Is this for real? I think the strain on this verse is obviously too great, but if you need an argument, I submit that there is an element in the verse that makes no sense in Camping's interpretation. It is the prepositional phrase "in Egypt." The traditional interpretation makes perfect sense of this phrase. Levi begat Jochebed in his old age, after he had moved to Egypt. This explains why, though Amram was Jochebed's nephew, they were about the same age. But Camping's interpretation leaves this phrase hanging in mid-air, with no purpose. If these are whole epochs of time, and the Epoch of Amram follows the 133-year Epoch of Kohath, it is obvious that Jochebed was born in Egypt.

Moreover, the traditional explanation squares with Exodus 2:1, which reads that "a man from the house of Levi went and took a daughter of Levi." It does not say "a daughter of the house of Levi" because Jochebed really was Levi's daughter. The contrast between "man of the house of Levi" and "daughter of Levi" cannot be accounted for in terms of Camping's hypothesis, for in his view both should have been called "of the house of Levi."

Now, I think it is clear that Numbers 26:59 completely demolishes Camping's view of Exodus 6. Numbers 26:59 eliminates any possibility of a 430 sojourn in Goshen, and also eliminates Camping's epoch approach to Exodus 6. Now we need to take up the sub-points of his "argument." (It is not actually an argument, as I've said before; rather, it is an assertion substantiated by other assertions.)

(5a). *Camping wants to know why Moses' parents are not named in Exodus 2.* He answers that this is because Amram and Jochebed are not his immediate parents, but just the patriarchs of the preceding epoch. The correct answer is that the theology of Exodus 2 concerns Levi, not the persons of Amram and Jochebed. The parents of Moses are Levites, and we understand this in light of Genesis 49:5-7. Levi must die and be born again, which happens to Moses when he is thrown into the water (with all the other dead Hebrew baby boys), and it happens to the Levites in general at the golden calf (Ex. 32). This is why Exodus 2 presents Moses as a true

(5b). *Camping wants to know how we can come up with 8600 Kohathites in the census of Numbers 3 if we follow a short chronology.* This is very easy to show. If Kohath was born in A.M. 2286 and his firstborn came when he was 20 in A.M. 2306, there are 208 years before the census. Let's assume 30 years for a generation and 4 sons per generation.

| | |
|------|--------------------|
| 2306 | 4 sons |
| 2336 | 16 grandsons |
| 2366 | 64 great-grandsons |
| 2396 | 256 Kohathites |
| 2426 | 1024 Kohathites |
| 2456 | 4096 Kohathites |
| 2486 | 16834 Kohathites |
| 2516 | 65536 Kohathites |

Of course, these people lived a long time and Exodus 1 says that they multiplied, teemed, and swarmed. Thus, four sons per generation is doubtless very low. Yet in fact, in A.M. 2514 we only have 8600 Kohathites. Pharaoh killed boy babies for a while in A.M. 2433 (the year of Moses' birth), but that campaign obviously did not last very long (or Moses would not have had anyone to lead out of Egypt). At any rate, 8600 is a perfectly reasonable figure and there is no justification whatsoever for Camping's assertion that "there could not possibly have been this many descendants in such a short period of time" (p. 281).

(5c). *Leah's Children.* Camping points out that after Joseph was born, Jacob sought to leave Haran and was persuaded to stay another 6 years. Thus, Joseph was born at the end of the first 7 years of Jacob's marriage. This means that all 7 of Leah's children were born during those 7 years, which is pretty much impossible.

There are three answers to this problem. The first is that it is, of course, barely possible, if Leah was passing the children on a wet nurse instead of nursing them herself (since women tend not to conceive while nursing).

The second answer, which I think has the most merit, is that this passage is not presented in strictly chronological order. The order is theological. First are described the ten "natural" sons, and then is described the birth of Joseph, the "miracle" son, born from a closed womb. Consider: first Abraham has a natural son, and then God opens Sarah's womb and the miracle son is born. The second born is the replacement for the fallen firstborn. Consider: Rebekah is barren, but God miraculously opens her womb. Her firstborn, Esau, is bad, and is replaced by the second-born, Jacob ("Supplanter"). Now we come to Jacob. The first ten sons are born without a miracle. They are bad, and sell Joseph into slavery. Joseph is the second-born, replacement son, born after the miracle. This is the structure of the passage.

So then, what is the chronology? Leah has four sons and stops bearing (Gen. 29:31-35). This easily takes up seven years, and these four sons are older than Joseph. Early in the seven years, Rachel gives Bilhah to Jacob, and two sons are born (Gen. 30:1-8). These are also probably older than Joseph. After she stops bearing, Leah gives Zilpah to Jacob, and she bears two sons (30:9-13). These are probably younger than Joseph, born during the final six years in Haran. At some point, Leah begins to have children again and bears Issachar and Zebulun (30:14-20), again during the last six years. We are told that afterward she bore Dinah, but this might have been after the departure from Haran.

takes it that Joseph was born after all the rest. Based on Genesis 31:38-41, Camping reconstructs as follows:

7 years to earn Rachel

7 years of marriage to earn Rachel again

20 years of employment

6 years to earn flocks

This provides Camping with 27 years of child-begetting, climaxing with the birth of Joseph before the last six years. It also enables him to make Levi 21 years older than Joseph, which satisfies the demands of his chronological scheme.

But does this reconstruction stand up? In Genesis 31:38 Jacob says to Laban that he has been with him for 20 years, serving honorably and being oppressed. In Genesis 31:41, just a couple of sentences later, he says, "These 20 years I have been in your house; I served you 14 years for your two daughters, and 6 years for your flock, and you changed my wages ten times." Camping admits that these sure do look like the same 20 years! He thinks that the language hints at a slight difference in the two periods, however, because during the 20 years of verse 38, Jacob had to pay for what was lost or stolen, which Camping does not think squares with the kinds of conditions a father-in-law-to-be would put on his daughter's future husband. But who says? Camping even tries to spice it up by saying that Jacob probably would have had to pay for any animals killed for his own food, but the text does not say this. Camping is grasping at straws here. Clearly the 20 years of verse 38 is the same as the 14 + 6 of verse 41.

(And by the way Laban reduced Jacob's status from kinsman to wage-earner one month after Jacob arrived, according to Genesis 29:14 contrasted with v. 15.)

(5d.) Camping has an additional argument to back up his belief in an extra 20 years. He says that the events of Genesis 38 could not all have happened before the descent into Egypt if the traditional understanding is correct. His mistake here is a simple error in arithmetic. Here is what he writes; see if you can spot the error: "On the presumption of a twenty year Haran sojourn, Jacob could not have been less than 88 or 89 when Judah was born. Since Jacob was 130 when he entered Egypt, Judah could not have been older than 31 or 32 years when he entered Egypt. During this thirty-one or thirty-two years Judah would have had to grow from a baby to manhood, and additionally, all of the events of Genesis 38 would need to have taken place."

Well, you can see it: Judah would have been 41 or 42, not 31 or 32. And that is just barely time for the events of Genesis 38, if we assume marriages at around age 17, which is not all that early. But this passage may well be dischronologized. Thematically Genesis 38 is linked with Genesis 37. Judah falls

into the sin that Joseph resisted (adultery). Given the structure of Genesis, there is no good place to stick this story if it happened later than the descent into Goshen. We have every reason to believe that after they relocated their headquarters to Goshen, the Hebrews continued to pasture up in Canaan (1 Chronicles 7:21-22, 23-24). We are told in Genesis 38 that Judah married at about the time Joseph was sold to Potiphar. I believe Judah and Joseph were about the same age, so Judah was about 18. We then read that after a long time Judah's wife died. This comes after Tamar's first two disastrous marriages. Almost certainly this projects the rest of the story into the period after the relocation of the Hebrew encampment to Goshen. Though dischronologized, Genesis 38 first exactly with the theological order of presentation in Genesis, showing the kinds of sins the Hebrews were prone to fall into if they remained in Canaan, and explaining why God sent them into a sanctuary in Goshen.

Camping points to Genesis 46:12, which says that Judah's sons by Tamar, born at the end of Genesis 38, went down into Egypt with Jacob. At first glance, this indicates that they were born before the descent into Goshen, which as we have seen is just barely possible. However, the last clause in the verse mentions the two sons of Perez, who are included in the count in verse 15. Nobody, not even Camping, can believe that these sons were born before the descent into Egypt. Thus, the list of names in Genesis 46 has to be taken as a genealogical summary, and not as a list of those who, head for head, made the trek. (And note 46:21, which lists 10 descendants, including grandchildren, of Benjamin; obviously these had not been born before the descent into Egypt!)

Summary

Camping's argument is a series of props that do not stand up. The notion that the life spans of the primordial patriarchs are calendars is propped up by appeal to Exodus 6, which is propped up by an appeal to Jacob's supposedly 40-year sojourn in Haran, which is propped up by an appeal to Genesis 38. We have seen that Genesis 38 does not support a 40-year sojourn in Haran for Jacob. We have seen that nothing else in the Bible hints at such a 40-year sojourn. We have seen, therefore, that the history of Jacob does not support Camping's assertions about Exodus 6. We have seen that Camping's position on Exodus 6 is contradicted by Numbers 26:59 and Galatians 3:17. Thus, Exodus 6 does not provide a series of epochs related to Levitical life spans, and therefore provides no corroboration for Camping's hypothesis regarding Genesis 5 & 11.

And there is nothing else in the Bible that provides any substantiation for this hypothesis either. Case closed.

(to be concluded)