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Genesis 5 & 11: Theological Reflections

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The numbers found in Genesis 5 & 11 display characteristics that indicate a complex and meticulous symbolic **schematization** operating at several levels. Because these numbers are so potent symbolically, unbelieving scholars have universally (as far as I know) treated them as artificial. Believers take them **literall**y, but believers must also reflect on their meaning. Our purpose in this essay is to uncover what we can of their significance.

First of all, we notice that there are 10 generations from Adam to Noah, and also 10 generations from Noah to **Abram**:

Adam	Noah
Seth	Shem
Enosh	Arpachshad
Kenan	Shelah
Mahalalel	Eber
Jared	Peleg
Enoch	Reu
Methuselah	Serug
Lamech	Nahor
Noah	Terah
Japheth	Nahor
Shem	Abram
Ham	Haran

This numerical scheme seems contrived, and that's because it is indeed contrived. The question is: Who contrived it? Was it contrived by a "priestly redactor" late in the history of the kingdom of Judah, or even after the exile, who was simply trying to show that God superin-

tends history; or was it contrived by God Himself, the **Playwrite** of all history? For believers, the answer must be the latter.

This, however, is only the **beginning**. To help us consider these passages, we shall summarize the data in tabulations that follow. As regards Genesis 5, we are told how old each patriarch was at the time of the birth of his significant son, how many more years he lived, and then we are given the total of the years of his life. Moreover, in most cases, these numbers are given in a strangely elaborate form, which contrasts with the way numbers are ordinarily written in the Bible. Usually, large numbers in Hebrew are given in this form:

"And the years of the life of Levi were 7 & 30 & 100 years" (Ex. **6:16**).

"And Moses was a son of 100 & 20 years when he died" (**Dt. 34:7**).

"A son of 16 years he was when he **became** king, and 50 & 2 years he reigned in Jerusalem" (2 Kings **15:2**).

In these instances, drawn at random, we see that the word "years" appears only once, after all the numbers. In most instances in Genesis 5 & 11, however, the numbers are partially separated by the repeated term "yeas"; to wit:

"And Methuselah lived 7 & 80 years and 100 years and begat **Lamech**. And Methuselah lived after begetting **Lamech** 2 & 80 years and 700 years, and he begat sons and daughters. And all of the days of Methuselah were 9 & 60 years and 900 years, and he died" (**Gen. 5:25-27**).

This literary structure has the effect of creating several significant chains of numbers, which now follow:

	Lifespans	Numbers as written in Hebrew		
A&m	130+800=930	130	+ 800	= 900 & 30
Seth	105+807=912	5 & 100	+ 7 & 800	= 12 & 900
Enosh	90+815=905	90	+ 15 & 800	= 5 & 900
Kenan	70+840=910	70	+ 40 & 800	= 10 & 900
Mahalalel	65 +830=895	5 & 60	+ 30 & 800	= 95 & 800
Jared	162+800=962	62 & 100	+ 800	= 62 & 900
Enoch	65+300=365	65	+ 300	= 65 & 300
Methuselah	187 + 782= 969	87 & 100	+ 82 & 700	= 69 & 900
Lamech	182+595 =777	82 & 100	+ 95 & 500	= 77 & 700

Noah's years are not given in this form. Genesis **5:32** says that "Noah was a son of **500** years and he begat Shem, Ham, and **Japheth**." (According to Genesis 10:21, **Japheth** was the eldest, and according to Genesis **9:24**, Ham was the youngest.) "Noah was a son of **600** years when the flood put waters on the earth" (**Gen. 7:6**).

Also, Genesis **9:28-29** says that Noah lived 350 years after the Flood, for a total of 950 years, using this form:

Noah After Flood: 300 years & 50 years
 Total: **900 years & 50 years**

Let us notice a couple of significant features of this data so far. **First**, the text says that A&m was 130 years

old when he begat Seth; it does not say that he was 30 years & **100** years old. This contrasts with every other item in the list. Why this is so is unclear.

Second, in the cases of Adam and Noah, the total life span is given in reversed literary order from the rest; in their cases alone the number of centuries is given first, and then the remainder of years. This links the two men as progenitors of humanity.

Let us now consider the post-flood patriarchs in Genesis 11. Here the information is simpler, in that we are not given the total number of years each patriarch lived; we have to figure that out for ourselves from the data provide (age at birth of significant son+ remaining years):

	Lifespans	Numbers as Written In Hebrew		
Shem	100+500(=600)	100	+ 500	
Arpachshad	35+403(=438)	35	+ 3 & 400	
Shelah	30+403(=433)	30	+ 3 & 400	
Eber	34 +430(=464)	34	+ 30 & 400	
Peleg	30+209(=239)	30	+ 9 & 200	
Reu	32+207(=239)	32	+ 7 & 200	
Serug	30 +200(=230)	30	+ 200	
Nahor	29+119(=148)	29	+ 19 & 100	
Terah	70(+ 135) =205	70	(+135)	= 5 & 200

In all these cases, the century years follow the extra years.

Now, this peculiar way of stating years is also used sometimes in the rest of Genesis for the patriarchs, and for a couple of other significant **periods** in the Bible; to wit:

Abram enters land (Gen.12:4)	5 years & 70 years
Abram receives Ishmael (Gen. 16:16)	80 years & 6 years
Covenant of circumcision (Gen. 17:1)	90 years & 9 years
(contrast 17:24)	99 years
Lifespan of Sarah (Gen. 23:1)	100 & 20 & 7
Lifespan of Abraham (Gen. 25:7)	100 & 70 & 5
Lifespan of Ishmael (Gen. 25:17)	100 & 30 & 7
Lifespan of Isaac (Gen. 35:28)	100 & 80
Lifespan of Jacob (Gen. 47:28)	7 & 40 & 100
Lifespan of Joseph (Gen. 50:22, 26)	1 10; 110 (note contrast)
Sojourn in Egypt (Ex. 12:40, 41)	30 & 400; 30 & 400
Lifespan of Aaron (Num. 33:9)	123 (note contrast)
Lifespan of Moses (Dt. 34:7)	120 (note contrast)
Lifespan of Joshua (Josh. 24:29)	110 (note contrast)
Exodus to Temple (1 Ki. 6:1)	80 & 400

What accounts for this oddity of expression? One **thing** we can notice is that outside of the patriarchs, the only other two **occurrences** of this form are found in **connection** with the exodus from Egypt and the building of the Temple; or perhaps more pointedly the building the Tabernacle (representing Israel and the world) and the Temple (representing the same). The last patriarch whose years are recounted in this way is Israel himself.

The years of the patriarchs are recounted in this elaborate manner from Adam to Noah and Shem, from Shem to **Eber**, and from Eber (Hebrew) to Jacob (Israel). The period from Abraham the Hebrew to the Exodus is recounted this way, as is the period from the Exodus to the Temple. Thus, from creation to the Temple, the first 3000 years of history, this extended form is used.

The only person whose lifespan is recounted this way who does not seem to belong in the list is **Ishmael**, but when we consider that **Ishmael** represents the entire converted Gentile world, sons of Egyptian women who recognize Abraham as father, we can see why his lifespan is signified by this lengthened form. (On **Ishmael's** conversion, see Genesis 21:20, "God was with the lad, " as explained by the same phrase two verses later in 21:22.)

This lengthened formula of dating is used in the patriarchs for the **birth** of the significant son (**Gen. 5 & 11**), and for certain events in the life of Abraham: his entrance into the kind (the microcosmic world), the birth of **Ishmael** (the portion of humanity that is saved and led), and the promise of Isaac (the portion of humanity, ultimately Christ, that saves and leads).

Finally, in the cases of A&m and Noah, the centuries come first and then the remaining years. This is also true of Abraham and his immediate family (Sarah, **Ishmael**, Isaac). Thus, Abraham is **presented** as a Third Adam, a new progenitor.

Fascinating Numbers

The style of writing we have been examining has the effect of isolating the hundreds from the rest of a number. Thus, the number 782 becomes 700 + 82. This causes us to reflect on these numbers in a more precise way than we might: We don't simply ask what the number 782 might signify, or what its factors might be; but we also ask what the numbers 700 and 82 might mean and what their factors might be. When we do this, something odd turns up: **Virtually** every number in these lists ends in either 0, **2,5, 7, or 9. Moreover, it can easily be shown that every number is composed of 10s, 5s, and 7s.** The texts of Genesis 5 & 11 provide us with 38 numbers (not counting hundreds). If we were to take 18 people out of the population at random, and take the year their first child was born, the number of additional years they lived, and their total lifespan, what are the odds that all of these numbers would be composed of 10s, 5s, and 7s?

You can look back at the list and see these numbers. **First** comes Adam, with a 30. Then comes Seth, with a 5

(105) and a 7 (807) for a total of 12 (912). The numbers in Seth's life provide a clue for understanding certain other numbers, as we shall see. Here are the rest:

Enosh	90, 15,5
Kenan	70,40, 10
Mahalalel	5, 30, 95
Jared	62 (50 +[5 +7])
Enoch	65
Methuselah	87, 82 (70+[5+7]), 69 (50 +[5 +7]+7)
Lamech	82 (70+[5+7]), 95, 77

Notice that the more complex numbers are still composed of fives and sevens. 62 is built from 50, and 82 is built from 70.

5+7= 12, and 12 is certainly a significant number. It appears first with Seth (105 +807 =912). **Jared's** 62 is 50+ 12; and Methuselah's 82 is 70+ 12. Methuselah's 69 is 50+12+7.

Certain other numbers also are composed of 5 & 7. For instance, **Mahalalel** lived "**5** years and 60 years" and begat Jared, while **Enoch** lived "65 years" and begat Methuselah. **Mahalalel** comes first, and explains 65 to us. 65 is (**5x12**)+**5**; or (**5x[5+7]**)+**5**.

The number 95, which occurs twice in the series, might be seen simply as a multiple of 5, or as (7X10) +(**5x5**).

When we turn to Genesis 11, we have fewer numbers, but they are equally curious. Here again are the numbers as given in the text, this time including the hundreds:

Shem	100, 500
Arpachshad	35, 3+400
Shelah	30, 3+400
Eber	34, 30 + 400
Peleg	30, 9 + 200
Reu	32, 7 + 200
Serug	30, 200
Nahor	29, 19 + 100
Terah	70, 5 + 200

At first glance, we are struck by the predominance of 3, itself a very significant number in the Bible: the number of the preliminary crisis in the middle of the week (3d day, 3d week, 3d hour, 3d year, etc.). At second glance, however, most of these 3s are visibly and inescapably linked with 4s, to make symbolic 7s. Notice **these** numbers from the list:

3 + 400 (twice)
30 + 400
 34

We should not fail to see the obvious allusion to 7 here.

Moreover, Arpachshad's 35 years are 5x7. **With Terah** we have a 70 and a 5. **Peleg's** 9 seems an anomaly, but the next Patriarch, Reu, has the same total number of years, but with a 2 and a 7 instead. Reu's 32 seems to be 20+ 5+7. Nines show up again with Nahor, but here again these nine only conceal 5s and 7s:

$$19 = 5+7+7$$

Now, it is amazing enough that out of such a small population sampling, we should find virtually **all** the numbers ending in 0, 2, 5, 7, & 9. It is even more amazing to find that all the 2s and 9s reduce to 7s in such a way that the remainder of the number is also significant in terms of this system of 5s and 7s (see Note below). It is even more amazing to find that almost **all** of the few 3s and 4s that do crop up are visibly **paired**, forming 7s of some sort.

But what is yet more amazing is that this system continues on in Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch, with the addition of the number **3** (which we have **seen** creeping into Genesis 11). Consider these **lifespans**:

Sarah	100 & 20 & 7
Abraham	100 & 70 & 5
Ishmael	100 & 30 & 7
Isaac	100 & 80
Jacob	7 & 40 & 100
Joseph	110
Sojourn	430 years
Levi	137 (Ex. 6)
Kohath	133 (Ex. 6)
Amram	137 (Ex. 6)
Aaron	123
Moses	120
Joshua	110

[NOTE: Of course, any number above 2 and 9 themselves can be reduced to 5s and 7s and 10s. For instance, 99 is 7+7+5+80. What is significant about the 2s and 9s in the Genesis 5 chronology is that once we've subtracted the 7s and 5s necessary to get a round number (divisible by 10), that number itself is either 50 or 70. The only such numbers are 62, 69, and 82.]

The occurrence of these numbers 5, 7, 10, and 12 invites us to consider the genealogies themselves.

The fifth from Noah is Eber, who is directly tied to the witness of Shem in Genesis 10:21, and whose name is heard in the term "Hebrew." The Hebrews are the focussed continuance of the religious calling of Shem.

The fifth from Adam is **Mahalalel**. What is significant about him is that he died in the year A.M. 1290, which is 366 years before the Flood. Considering that Enoch lived 365 years, we are entitled to **see** the number 366 as

Year of grace, which was extended by one **further** year, before the Flood. (Also, it may be noted that 1290 is 3x430, and recurs with **exodus-connotations** in Daniel 12:11.)

The seventh from Adam is Enoch, who walked with God after 365 years and was taken to heaven without passing through earthly death. The fourteenth from Adam is **Eber**, whose name is preserved in the word Hebrew. The twenty-first from Adam is Isaac, the miracle son.

The seventh from Noah is Reu. What is significant about him is only indirectly revealed. Let's go back: The seventh from Adam in the line of Cain is the murderous **polygamistic** poet **Lamech—quite** a contrast to Enoch. Reu also contrasts with the seventh from Noah in this way: Eber had two sons: **Peleg** and **Joktan**. The **Joktanites** were involved in Babel (**Gen.10:30 + 11:2**). Genesis **10:26-29** lists 13 sons of **Joktan**, who moved east with him and were involved with Babel. By way of contrast, we are **only** given one son of **Peleg** by name: Reu. The Hebrew Reu continued the true line when the Hebrew **Joktanites** apostatized.

The tenth from Adam is Noah; the tenth from Noah is Terah, father of Abram. Since the second chronology starts with Shem, we can also see that Abram is tenth from Shem. The fifteenth from Adam is **Peleg**, in whose days the earth was divided at the tower of Babel. The twentieth from Adam is Abram.

The **twelfth** from Adam is **Arpachshad**, born after the Flood. The twelfth from Noah is Isaac, the miracle son born after the circumcision. (The coming of circumcision in Genesis 17 should be regarded as an historical event analogous to the Flood or to the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost; it created a new world.) The twelfth from Shem is Israel.

Now, if we consider the other names on the list, which have no numerical association with **5, 7, 10, or 12**, we find that nothing significant is said about any of them:

Enosh

Kenan

Jared

Lamech, father of Noah (an exception: he uttered a prophecy)

Shelah

Serug

Nahor