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THE LONG-LIVED ANTEDILUVIANS. GENESIS V.¹

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Some points of a general character concerning chapter 5.—The biblical material in detail.—The resemblance between the two lines.—The long lives of the antediluvians.—The material outside of the Bible.—The results of the study.—Our estimate of the material from the literary, the historical, the religious points of view.—The purpose of the writer.

The chapter which furnishes us material for our study is one concerning the purpose of which many have been in doubt; it is the genealogical table of Adam's descendants through Seth. In connection with it there are many traditions which have been handed down by other nations.

I. Some of the general points which present themselves for consideration are the following:

1) *The artificial form* of the chapter, which a single reading clearly shows. Nothing, from a literary point of view, could seem more unnatural than the care taken to reproduce the material word for word in paragraph after paragraph, the only changes being the name of the patriarch and the number of years before and after the birth of his first son.

2) *The language of the chapter.* If we exclude the numerals and the stereotyped formulas, we find that the vocabulary of the chapter, long as it is, does not exceed fifty words.

3) *The style.* The systematic arrangement is seen in the introductory formula, "These are the generations," etc.; in the structure of the table, each paragraph of which closes with the

¹Some of the literature bearing upon this subject is as follows: *Dods*, Genesis; *Kalisch*, Genesis; *Dillmann*, Die Genesis; *Delitzsch* (Franz), Genesis; *Lange*, Commentary on Genesis; *The Pulpit Commentary*, Genesis; *Lenormant*, Beginnings of History, chapters 5, 6; *Schrader*, The Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament; *Harper and Green*, The Pentateuchal Question, Genesis i-xii, Hebraica, Vol. V; *Ewald*, History of Israel, Vol. I; *Budde*, Die Biblische Urgeschichte; *Geikie*, Hours with the Bible, Vol. I, chapter 12; *Goldziher*, Mythology among the Hebrews; *Smith*, Bible Dict., articles on the various names in the chapter.

monotonous phrase, "and he died;" in the ten-linked genealogy branching from Noah, when he is five hundred years old, into three branches. The chronological and statistical character of the chapter need not be dwelt upon. When we note the extreme minuteness of the chapter and contrast it with the fabulous and grotesque mythology of other nations, we appreciate the preciseness of the style. It may be pronounced rigid and stereotyped, since there is to be found no digression from a single type. The chapter is really a column of names and dates; there is no life or color in it. Its fondness for set phrases is marked, and there is entire absence of historical perspective. That it is verbose and repetitious follows from what has already been said.

4) Attention has already been called to the *peculiar features of 5: 29*. This verse is distinguished from all that precedes or follows it. The style is so different, the language and the thought itself is in such contrast with the remainder of the chapter, that the verse would seem to have been transferred from the prophetic narrative to the priestly table.²

5) *The resemblances between chapters 4 and 5*. These have been pointed out in the former article.³ When we consider the number of names given, in one, ten, in the other, seven; the triple division which closes each list; the remarkable similarities in form; the different characters assigned to the Lamechs and the Enochs of the two lines, we find much that is plausible in Lenormant's view, that "both genealogies are ideally constructed in order to establish an exact and consistent parallelism between the two lines of descent, from the criminal and accursed son and from a just and blessed son, by marking the contrast between malediction and election in the contrast in signification of each line, which resemble each other so much in sound."

II. *The Biblical Material* may be considered under the following heads:

1) *The statement made concerning each patriarch*. This may be summarized in the formula: A lived — years and begat B; and A lived after he begat B, — years, and begat sons

²See *The Biblical World*, April, p. 266.

³See *The Biblical World*, April.

and daughters; and all the days of A were — years; and he died. It will be seen that the writer has given us (a) the number of years before the birth of the first son, (b) the number of years after the birth of the first son, (c) the fact that other children were begotten, (d) the total number of years of life, and (e) a statement of the death.

2) *Special information concerning Enoch (5: 24).* He is the seventh descendant from Adam; the number is not without its significance. He walks with God in contrast with those about him. In him, man approaches God most closely. His contemporaries were depraved. "He was not, for God took him." Nothing is said of sickness or burial. Was this death or translation? The world has understood the latter. Was the early removal a punishment? Was it a misfortune? Tradition has always understood it as something unusual, indeed, miraculous. One can hardly understand the "taking away" of Enoch aside from a belief in a future life. With this story we may compare that of Elijah, 2 Kings 2: 9 and the reference in the Epistle to Hebrews 11: 5; we recall also that Hercules, Ganymede, and Romulus are said to have been translated; that the Babylonian Hasisadra, the Noah of the deluge, was also translated. It was believed in Central America that the four progenitors of mankind were suddenly raised to heaven. Is it true that "similar events in heathen myths are kindred images of heavenly aspiration?" Everyone is familiar with the late legends regarding Enoch, and with the ascription to him of the invention of writing and of Babylonian astrology. Is there not meaning to be found in the number of his years, three hundred and sixty-five? "This wondrous issue of Enoch's life, filling in the middle of the time between Adam and the flood, was a preaching of repentance, and for the faithful, an object for the eye of hope to rest upon; it was, in the midst of the reign of death, a finger-post pointing backwards to show that an ascending development of man was possible even without death, and forwards, to show that the aspiration after redemption from the dominion of death and Hades would not remain unsatisfied."¹

¹ Delitzsch, *in loc.*

3) *The interruption in the case of Lamech (5: 29).* The utterance ascribed here to Lamech, when Lamech's son Noah is born, is in striking contrast with the insolent defiance of Lamech the Gainite. In a pun based upon a similarity of sound in the Hebrew between the name of Noah and the word meaning "comfort" or "consolation," he says: "This same shall comfort us for our work and for the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed." Noah is thus made to embody a prediction of relief and deliverance. To what is reference made? Is this relief to be found (a) in the permission given to eat flesh, so that "man is no more entirely dependent upon the uncertainty of the skies, finding in the use of flesh rest from the uninterrupted fatigues of agriculture, a consolation for the curse which has been pronounced?"² or (b) in "the vine which makes glad the hearts of men and gods, and which, through Noah, will bring joy and relief to the sin-cursed world?"³ or (c) in the new era which Noah introduces, an era, the great feature of which is the promise, with its emblem the rainbow, the era of the new covenant made by God with man, "a pledge of the future total abolition of the curse, the future soul supremacy of love?"

4) Several explanations have been offered of the resemblances introduced in the names of the two lines. According to some, the people of the two lines were acquainted with each other, and since names were not yet common, nothing could have been more natural than for them to borrow one⁴ from the other. According to others, the two lists originally had the same object, to exhibit the first beginnings of the human race, one deriving the race from Cain, the other, from an ancestor, Abel; the addition of Adam was later. According to others, the similarity in the two lists is the result of an effort to make the parallelism of the two lines clear. As has been indicated, we have, according to Lenormant, an ideal representation of the character of each line, the one good, the other bad, the names being differentiated in order to convey these ideas.

5) One of the serious difficulties which presents itself to

² Kalisch.

³ Budde.

many minds is the question of the long lives of the antediluvians. Here belong certain important considerations:

(1) *The evident meaning of the writer.* He says that the patriarchs lived hundreds of years. From all that can be gathered from the text, the writer evidently believed this. The people who heard him and men living in all periods of the world's history have accepted the statement.

(2) *The variations of the ancient versions.* The following table exhibits the number of years according to the Hebrew, Samaritan, and Septuagint, and according to Josephus. A glance at this table will show that the variations are many and interesting.

	HEBREW.		SAMARITAN.		SEPTUAGINT.		JOSEPHUS.	
	Age at son's birth.	Age at death.	Age at son's birth.	Age at death.	Age at son's birth.	Age at death.	Age at son's birth.	Age at death.
ADAM.....	130	930	130	930	230	930	230	930
SETH.....	105	912	105	912	205	912	205	912
ENOS.....	90	905	90	905	190	905	190	905
CAINAN.....	70	910	70	910	170	910	170	910
MAHALALEL.....	65	895	65	895	165	895	165	895
JARED.....	162	962	62	847	162	962	162	962
ENOSH.....	65	365	65	365	165	365	165	365
METHUSELAH.....	187	969	67	720	187	969	187	969
LAMECH.....	182	777	53	653	188	753	182	777
NOAH.....	500	950	500	950	500	950	500	950
SHEM.....	100		100		100		100	
DELUGE.....	1656		1307		2262		2256	

According to the Hebrew, the number of years from Adam to the deluge was 1656; according to the Septuagint, 2262; according to the Samaritan, 1307. If we study the history of interpretation, we find that each of these numberings has had its staunch supporters. The Hebrew was accepted by Jerome, Augustine, Buxtorf, Michaelis; the Septuagint, by the Hellenistic Jews and the early church; in more recent times, by George Rawlinson; the Samaritan has been less widely accepted, though in recent times one or two scholars have favored it.*

Many explanations have been offered of the variations themselves. The following are a few of the suggestions that have been made: (a) They are due to accidental errors in reading and writing; (b) the smaller number of the Samaritan is due to an effort to decrease the length of life; (c) the changes in

* Bertheau; Budd.

the Septuagint are due to an effort to synchronize biblical and Egyptian chronology; (d) the 1656 lunar years of the Hebrew would be 1600 solar years, making ten generations of one hundred and sixty years each, the duration of life in the first period, that in the second period being one hundred and twenty years; (e) the Samaritan was the original and the number 1307 was changed to 1656 by the Hebrews in order to make Methuselah the only survivor at the time of the deluge. If the Samaritan version is accepted, Jared, Methuselah, and Lamech must have been living at the time of the deluge. If so, what was their fate?

Such explanations partake largely of the element of conjecture. A careful comparison of the three shows that the Hebrew list is to be regarded as authoritative. Moreover, in the Hebrew calculation there may be seen a plan. Accepting the summary of 1656, it will be found that from the beginning of the world to the Exodus covers 2666 years. This is equivalent to two thirds of four thousand, the number of years according to a common tradition from the creation of the world until the coming of the Messiah. This number of years is obtained by counting one hundred generations of forty years each. In other words, the numbers are based upon "arithmetical reflection," and the representation is an *ideal* one.

6) One must consider also the possibility or impossibility of this longevity. The ancients believed in the long lives of the first generations. Josephus suggests that man had been lately created and was consequently more vigorous; that food was more appropriate; that men in those days were more virtuous, and so were granted longer lives; that the long life was given also that man might make astronomical and geometrical discoveries, the completion of the great year requiring six hundred years. The writer, according to Kalisch, represents that man was intended for an immortal existence, but sin introduced disease and his strength was gradually cut down until it reached its present limits. Each generation inherited less of the primitive vigor. The reduction was gradual, as is seen in the nine hundred and fifty years of Methuselah, the one hundred and seventy-five of Abraham, the one hundred and forty-seven of

Jacob, the one hundred and twenty of Moses, the one hundred and ten of Joshua, and the seventy of the Psalmist. Various considerations have been offered to explain the longevity; the climate was different, the life more simple and even, the paradisaical state was still at work, the food was better, men were more pious. But these attempts at natural explanations have long since ceased to satisfy, and it has been found most easy to understand that the longevity was a distinct act of grace furnished,¹ (a) "to show divine clemency in suspending the penalty of sin, (b) as a symbol of immortality which had been recovered for men by the promise of the woman's seed, (c) as a medium of transmission of the faithful for the benefit of the church and the world."

We are told that one person in one hundred thousand reaches the age of one hundred, one person in five hundred reaches the age of ninety; that in the mountains of South Dagestan it is not unusual for men to live to the age of one hundred and fifty, and in the Arabian deserts men sometimes live to the age of two hundred. According to physiologists, the present body cannot live more than two hundred years.

Manifestly one of three positions must be taken: the long lives are due to miraculous influence, or the original numbers have been exaggerated, or there must be found some way to evade the apparent meaning of the language.

7) *Various theories of explanation.* It has been suggested (a) that the names given us in this chapter do not represent individuals, but races or epochs, and that the meaning of each name presents the chief characteristic of the race or epoch; (b) that we have in the list only an abstract of the genealogy, one name perhaps in four or five, a method for which parallels are found in the genealogical statements of Matthew and Luke; (c) that the word "year" everywhere means "month" and consequently that a life of nine hundred and sixty years is to be reduced to eighty; (d) that the whole representation is mythical.

It would be easy to show the weakness of each of these explanations. In Genesis 10, the writer undoubtedly speaks of nations and cities rather than of individuals, but there is no trace

¹ *The Pulpit Commentary, in loc.*

of such a usage in this chapter. If language means anything, the writer wished to convey the idea that these were the names of men. If the list is only an abstract, it would be necessary to suppose that it originally contained eighty to one hundred names, instead of ten, but such a supposition is impossible in view of the specific character of the language used concerning the age of the father at the birth of his son. The reduction of years to months would furnish a natural explanation of much of the material; but upon the basis of this calculation Enoch would have been only five years old at the time of the birth of his first son. To assume that this is mythical is a gratuitous begging of the whole question. Some other explanation must be found.

III. We may briefly consider the material outside of the Bible which bears upon this subject.

1) According to Persian tradition, Gayomeratan, the typical man, is followed by nine heroes, mythical or semi-historical. Later tradition calls ten Peshdadian kings the first terrestrial monarchs, or men of the ancient law.

2) In the Hindoo tradition we find ten great saints, the offspring of Menu, ten personifications of Vishnu, while Brahma with nine others makes the ten fathers.

3) Among the Chinese the first historical king Hoangti is the last of ten emperors who have something of the divine nature.

4) Among the Germans and Scandinavians there were ten ancestors of Odin.

5) Among the Arabs, ten mythical kings of Ad, the original people of the country.

6) A historical papyrus of Turin, in its list of Egyptian dynasties, refers to ten kings who governed men at the beginning of things.

7) Very interesting is the tradition of seven instead of ten. Here may be noted the Cainite list, in which the names from Adam to Lamech, the father of the three, contains seven names. If in the Persian list the enumeration is begun with Yema, the first man, the number is seven. While the Turin papyrus of the Egyptian makes ten, the more generally received number in Thebes and Memphis was seven. The Chaldeans record six suc-

cessive divine revelations before the flood, and these with the flood make seven. In many cases the Hindoos substitute seven for ten, as in the seven great saints, the seven primordial fathers.

8) Among the Assyrians and Babylonians we have the names of ten antediluvian kings given by Berosus.

9) An Armenian tradition handed down by Abydenus tells of ten ancestral heroes.

10) It was a common belief that the earliest men lived to a great old age. The references to this belief in the records of Egypt, Phœnicia, Chaldea, and the most ancient Greeks are numerous.

IV. What now, are the results of the study and of the comparison of the material? These may be summed up as follows:

1) The biblical material and the outside material in form are of common origin.

2) That origin is difficult to determine. The number ten without question represents that which is complete. In the mind of the writer the period is a complete period in the history of the world.

3) The difference between biblical and the outside material are the same as those noticed in the preceding stories.

4) In estimating the material we may conclude

(1) From the literary point of view much cannot be said of chapter five. It is a table, not a story; a collection of statistics, not a picture. It lays claim to nothing more; it is nothing more.

(2) It is not historical in the proper sense of that word. The names are ideal names gathered from the stories known to all the world. The number of names, ten, is ideal. The number of years each patriarch lived is not known, there being three distinct accounts. Selecting that account which seems most original, we find that the total number of years is a portion of the ideal collection which makes one hundred generations of forty years each, four thousand, two-thirds of which have passed at the time of the exodus, one-third of which will elapse before the coming of the Messiah.

(3) Unless we allegorize or spiritualize the numbers, the chapter does not contain much that is religious. It is a priest, a

careful, calculating, minute, precise priest, who has prepared the table. By itself the narrative teaches little; but for the two interesting variations concerning Enoch and Lamech, from the ordinary style of the chapter, we should have little or nothing of religious value. We may compare the first ten chapters of Chronicles. Kalisch has thus described it: "The chronological list contained in our chapter specifies the generation between Adam and Noah; between the first and second father of the human families; between the unconscious innocence of infancy, and the self-acquired intellectual righteousness of manhood; between the creation of the earth and its all but total destruction; between the divine love which called man into existence, and the divine justice which, with grief and reluctance, was compelled to annihilate him."

(4) The connection with what precedes and follows is close. Chapter five continues from chapter 2:3. The thought is a continuation of the first story of creation. The language and the style are the same as those found in that story. We find here the same word for God, "Elohim," and the same characteristic expressions. It is followed by the story of the deluge in the time of Noah, whose familiar history is taken up later.

(5) What now is the purpose of the writer in presenting this table? It was intended to bridge the chasm between the creation account and the deluge; the creation account containing a covenant with Adam and culminating in the institution of the sabbath, and the deluge account culminating in the covenant with Noah, and the giving of flesh to eat. It is an outline; a sketch of the history of this great cycle. The cycle is itself a complete and perfect one, and so the number of generations is a complete one. Ten means completion. The purpose of the writer is accomplished.