

Robert Vannoy, Old Testament History, Lecture 3

Primeval Period, Genealogies & Chronology

Impact of Archaeology

I concluded what I wanted to say about Roman numeral I in the last class lecture. Now I think the point pertains generally to the results of archeological study which have turned up many things in a general way that substantiate the picture that is presented in Scripture historically. Most of those discoveries came after the time of Wellhausen. In other words, archeology in the late 1800s was just beginning, and there was very little that was done. So he was working in a situation where very little was known about the cultures of ancient Egypt and so forth. The influence of archeological research certainly has countered a lot of the skepticism of Wellhausen towards the validity of the historical materials in the Old Testament.

But even there, archaeology has not been able in the world of biblical scholarship generally to completely reverse that kind of negative criticism because in spite of archeological finds, which I think certainly point towards the trustworthiness of the Old Testament, generally speaking, you don't have a lot of archeological discoveries provide specific corroborations that are identical to what is spoken in the Scriptures. It is more general corroboration like one saying Egyptians knew how to write in 2700 B.C. where there used to be people who claimed in the 1800s that in the time of Moses nobody knew how to write. Of course, that's been shown to be unfounded, people did know how to write in the time of Moses and there were high cultures and they were very sophisticated.

Cautions on the Use of Archaeology

So I think that archeology has generally tended to support the historicity of the biblical material. But we need to look at that further, because sometimes I think people expect archeology to do too much and we don't want the Scripture to be put at disposal of the archeologists and let them get the final word. Can we

believe this or not? Do we have to go to them to find out? You have to be careful about how you use the argument from archeology. You can expect it to do too much or you can say that it's expected to do too little. There is a balance, critical discernment is what is needed.

I would use the archeological argument, but if we claim that archeology proves the Bible, from archeology, later the critics may come along with some other evidence from archeology saying it disproves the Bible. Then that could be a problem. We'll look at some illustrations of that, I'm just talking in the abstract. That means you have to be careful how you go about your use of archeology in order to "prove the Bible." I think in general we can say that archeology does confirm biblical history. I don't think you can talk in most instances of proof however, there are a few isolated instances of concrete confirmation.

Scripture as the Foundation of Faith

I think what Machen is saying is you come to know Christ through the Scripture and you learn who he is and why he came. You learn all you know of the gospel through the Scripture. So the Scripture becomes the foundation to one's religious experience. Even though the Scripture is foundational to the experience there is sort of a reciprocal action I think comes into play there. Your faith certainly confirms your experience. It confirms your thoughts in the Scripture and I think the Holy Spirit is at work. The Holy Spirit works through the Scripture and speaks to us through the Scripture. The Holy Spirit works in our heart and in our minds to open our understanding to accept what is in the Scripture so that there is kind of a reciprocal action. But I think that Machen is right, that the foundation for faith is the Scripture, the Spirit doesn't work apart from the Scripture. If you undermine the trustworthiness and the reliability of the Scripture people aren't going to listen to the Scripture they will have intellectual objections to them, it just closes it to them. The Holy Spirit can overcome that. The Holy Spirit I think chooses to work generally through normal procedures of rational thought

consideration. What is the basis for this Christian belief? Is it something that is believable and so forth. The Scripture is the foundation for belief.

The Bible is a means of revelation which points to Christ. It is a means to that end and we certainly worship Christ not the Scripture. Fundamentalists hold inerrancy and are often accused of biblio-idolatry, and certainly you want to avoid that. Jesus said to the Jewish people and the scribes of his time, “you search the Scriptures because it is in them that you think you have life, but you won’t come to me.” The Scripture, in a sense, because they were looking at it in the wrong way, was a hindrance to their coming to Christ because of the way they were going about it. I think history has taught us, when you do undermine the Scriptures it’s a process that will turn people away until they have very little faith left. That process is showing itself over and over again.

See if you put it that way you really very easily fall into, subjectivism. If you experience what is fundamental and central and that becomes subjective, then anybody’s experience can count. You don’t want to exclude the importance of the experience. Experience has a role but I don’t think its role is foundational.

II. The Primeval Period

General Remarks on Chronology

Let’s go on to Roman numeral II. “The Primeval Period.” There are two sub-points there, before coming to the first one let me just make a couple general remarks. When we discussed the character of the history writing of the Old Testament I mentioned that there are certain aspects of the nature of that history writing that don’t meet all the standards of modern western historiography. Now immediately when you come to this area of chronology you encounter one of these things. The chronological relationships, in modern western historiography are one of the first demands, there must be precision if you want to have history writing. You have to have precision in chronology. When you look at the Old Testament you find that chronological relationships are not always considered to be of great

importance. Now, don't misunderstand what I say, I said not always. There are parts of the Old Testament where chronology is a very significant. In the book of Kings there is very careful chronology of the kings of the north and the south but when you get back to the early parts of the Old Testament chronology it is not something that is explicitly treated. You have Abraham in Genesis 12 come on the scene without any designation of his time and place in ancient history. So it's always been a question how do you date Abraham? Where do you place him in extra-biblical ancient history? The time that Israel was in Egypt is another, I mentioned another question that is difficult to know for certain.

The same is true for the time prior to Abraham. You really have two major periods of time prior to Abraham. You have from Adam to the flood and Noah, and then you have from Noah to Abraham. Neither of those periods in my opinion, are dated for us in Scripture.

A. Genealogies – Gen. 5 & 11 and Chronology

Now attempts have often been made to date both the period from the creation to the flood and the flood to Abraham by use of the genealogies that occur in Genesis 5, which traces Adam's line down to Noah and then the second genealogy in Genesis 11 which traces from Noah and his sons--Shem, Ham and Japheth--down to Abraham. You have two genealogies in Genesis 1 through 12. Now as I mentioned some have tried to utilize those genealogies for chronological purposes to establish dates for Adam, Noah and Abraham. I don't think that is valid and I don't think it can be done. If it can't be done then there is no way to date that period, either of those periods. Now what I want to do when discussing this is under A. is give you a summarization of the basic propositions of the two articles written on this subject some time ago. One by William Henry Green and the other by B. B. Warfield. If you look at your bibliography sheet under Roman numeral II, those two articles are listed, William Henry Green, "Primeval Chronology" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 1890 and reprinted in Dr. Robert Newman's

book *Genesis One* as an appendix and then B. B. Warfield's article on "The Antiquity and Unity of the Human Race," originally published in the *Princeton Theological Review* in 1911 and also reprinted in a volume of his essays. Now both William Henry Green and B. B. Warfield were professors at Princeton Seminary in the late 1800's early 1900's. They addressed this issue and I think those two articles are as good as anything that has ever been written on this subject of the genealogies of Genesis 5 and Genesis 11. You might want to look them up and read them sometime, but what I want to do is try to summarize the thesis they develop in those articles for you.

B. 5 Propositions of Green and Warfield

1. The Idea That Man is of Recent Origin Has No Basis in Scripture

I will give you five theses or propositions and then support those with statements from Warfield or Green. 1. is "The idea that man is of recent origin, has no basis in Scripture." Warfield says on page 238 of his article, "The question of the antiquity of man has of itself no theological significance. It is to theology and such a matter of entire indifference how long man has existed on earth. It is only because of the contrast, which has been drawn between the short period, which seems to be allotted to human history in the biblical narrative and a tremendously long period, which certain schools of scientific speculation assigned to the duration of human life on earth that theology has become interested in the topic at all. There was thus created the appearance of a conflict between the biblical statements and the findings of scientific investigators and it became the duty of the theologians to investigate the matter. The asserted conflict proves however to be entirely factitious. The Bible does not assign a brief span to human history. This is done only by a particular mode of interpreting the biblical data, which is found on examination, that rests on no solid basis." So now the first proposition is "the idea that man is of recent origin has no basis in Scripture." That sort of a question is not something of theological significance, since the Scripture

doesn't address it.

2. The Attempt to Date the Creation of Man from Biblical Data Found in the Genealogies of Gen. 5 & 11 is an Invalid Procedure

Number 2. "The attempt to date the creation of a man from biblical data found in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 is an invalid procedure." Warfield says "it must be confessed indeed, that the impression is readily taken from a faulty view of the biblical record of the course of human history, that the human race is of comparably recent origin. It has been the usual supposition of simple Bible readers that the biblical data allow for the duration of life of the human race on earth of only a paltry 6,000 years or so. This supposition has become fixed in formal chronological schemes, which have become traditional and have even been given a place in the margins of our Bibles to supply the chronological framework on scriptural narrative. The most influential of these schemes is that which has been worked out by Arch Bishop Usher, 1650. It is this scheme, which has found a place in the margin of the authorized English version of the Bible since 1701. According to it the creation of the world was assigned to the year 4004." I am sure you are all familiar with that. "On a more careful scrutiny of the data on which these calculations rest, however, they are found not to supply a satisfactory basis for the constitution for a definite chronological scheme. This data consists largely and at crucial points solely on genealogical tables and nothing can be clearer than that it is precarious to the highest degree to draw chronological inferences from genealogical tables." Now, I think he is correct in that, as I mentioned the only way you can get at the date of creation and the date of the flood is by the genealogies of Genesis 5 and Genesis 11. Further on in his article he says, "for the whole space of time before Abraham if dependent entirely on instances drawn from genealogies and if the scriptural genealogies supply no solid basis for chronological inferences, it's clear that without scriptural data performing an estimate of any duration."

3. The Genealogies of Gen. 5 & 11 Have a Different Purpose than Chronology

Third point: “the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 have a different purpose than chronology. Their purpose is to show lines of descent.” Warfield says, “the general fact says that genealogies throughout Scripture were not conducted for a chronological purpose, and lend themselves ill to the basis for chronological calculations has been repeatedly shown very fully. But perhaps by no one more thoroughly than by Dr. William Henry Green,” in the article that I mentioned previously. “These genealogies must be esteemed trustworthy for the purposes for which they were recorded. But they cannot safely be pressed into use for other purposes for which they were not intended and for which they were not adapted.”

“In particular it’s clear that the genealogical purposes for which the genealogies were given did not require a complete record of all the generations through which the descent of the persons to whom they were assigned runs. But only inadequate indications of the particular line to which the descent in question comes. Accordingly it is found on examination that the genealogies of Scripture are freely compressed for all sorts of purposes and it can seldom be confidently affirmed, that they could contain a complete record of the whole series of generations. While it is often obvious that a very large number are omitted. There is no reason inherent in the nature of the scriptural genealogies,” and here’s a key statement in his article, “there is no reason of the inherent nature of the scriptural genealogies, why a genealogy of ten recorded links may not actually represent an actual descent of a hundred or a thousand or ten thousand links. The point established by the table is not that these are all links, which intervene between the beginning and the closing names. But that this is the line of descent through which, one traces back or down through the other.” Now that’s the heart of his thesis, when you get ten links add them to Noah in the recorded genealogy. That doesn’t mean there are only ten generations from Adam to Noah. All you have is that this is the line of descent from Adam to Noah, you don’t know how

many links there are or how many links may have been skipped.

a. Meaning of “Beget”

Now we will stop and discuss this a bit because I think there are several things that need further explanation. The first is this, we need to understand the meaning of the terms “bear” and “beget,” as used in biblical genealogy. When it says, “so and so bore” used for the female or “so and so begat,” used for the male, both of those terms whether used for the male or the female, frequently are utilized to indicate someone who became the ancestor of the individual named. Often both of these terms are used in the sense of “become the ancestor of.” If we in English today say “so and so begot so and so,” we would normally think of an immediate descent of an immediate son. That is not necessarily the sense in which it is used in the Scripture and in the Old Testament generally. It may or may not mean immediate descent.

b. Meaning of “son”

The other term is the word “son.” We use the term “son” when we think of immediate descent. When I speak of my son I am speaking of my one of my 3 boys. In Scripture it is often used as a descendant not necessarily immediate, but just descendant. Probably the easiest and clearest illustration with this sense of the term, is in Matthew 1:1 where it says, “Jesus Christ the son of Abraham, the son of David.” There you have a genealogy, there are only three links, but it doesn’t mean there are only three generations involved. It’s compressed and what you get is a line of descent. Jesus Christ comes to us from Abraham via David to himself, three links are given and the important thing is, he is the son of Abraham and he is the son of David in the sense of descendent. That’s characteristic of biblical genealogies.

Example from Gen. 46:16-18

Let's illustrate this further, by looking at Genesis 46:16-18. Genesis 46:16-18, I'm going to use the King James Version here because the King James Version follows quite literally the Hebrew text. If you look at the NIV it doesn't, although it is similar, it really obscures the point I am trying to make, because of the terminology it uses. Genesis 46:16-18 what you have there beginning in verse 16 "And the sons of Gad: Ziphion, and Haggi, Shuni, and Ezbon, Eri, and Arodi, and Areli. And the sons of Asher: Jimnah, and Ishuah, and Isui, and Beriah, and Serah their sister: and the sons of Beriah; Heber, and Malchiel." Yet, 18 is the key verse. "These *are* the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter, and these she bare unto Jacob, *even* sixteen souls." You see what verse 18 does, it summarizes all that's gone before and it says that those 16 names were sons of Zilpah when they are actually, including the sons Gad and Asher. She actually had these two, Gad and Asher, while these others are grandsons and great grandsons that are mentioned there. But if you total all 16 up it says, "these are the sons of Zilpah." Now obviously "son" there means immediate sons, grandsons and great grandsons. All are included in the term "son." What more is said "and these she bore unto Jacob." She bore these 16 sons to Jacob, even though it is talking about sons, grandsons and great grandsons. So you see that "to bare" there means she is an ancestress, it doesn't mean that she gave birth to them directly. She became the ancestor of the 16 and "the son" doesn't necessarily mean all are immediate sons. As far as terminology is concerned, you have to be careful, when you read a statement that "so and so begot so and so." The only conclusion you can draw from that is that it means descent. And of course that's the terminology you have in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and Genesis 11, "so and so begat so and so." All it means is at a certain point in time so and so became the ancestor of the next line. Now it may be the immediate sons, but it may be ten generations removed, may be as Warfield says it is a hundred or a thousand you don't know, because it is not specified. "Jesus Christ the son of Abraham the son of David." How many links

are there? You don't know, unless you have some other data to fill in. That's the first thing, terminology. Those three terms, "bare," "beget" and "son." They are used in quite a different sense than we are accustomed to the terms in the way we use them today.

c. Abridgement is the General Rule in Biblical Genealogy

Let me go onto the next point, to illustrate this further. Second sub-point is: "abridgement is the general rule in biblical genealogy." This is the third proposition making two explanatory points, according to terminology and the second is "abridgement is a general rule." Abridgement is compatible with the genealogy. The purpose of biblical genealogy is the means to show line of descent. Line of descent is important and abridgement doesn't violate that. Abridgement is compatible with showing line of descent. You don't need to trace every link in order to show that so and so was descended from whomever. The line of descent is what's important. Now let me show some examples that support "abridgement is a general rule." 1 Chronicles 26:24, you have a list of appointments made by David, 1 Chronicles 26:24 where you read, "And Shebuel the son of Gershom, the son of Moses, *was* ruler of the treasures." Now if you take that "son" as immediate descent you are saying there was a grandson of Moses in the time of David. Gershom we know was the first generation son of Moses. Now we know that from Exodus 2:22 where it tells us that Gershom was born to Moses of Zipporah his wife. There is a narrative context there so you know that the son is immediate descent. The next person mentioned here in 1 Chronicles 26:24 is Shebuel and you have about 400 years between Gershom and Shebuel so I think that it is quite apparent that the point here is line of descent. That Shebuel traces his ancestry back to Gershom and Moses. In this genealogy we don't have the intervening links.

In 1 Chronicles 6:1-3 you have a genealogy from Levi to Moses, "The sons of Levi: Gershom, Kohath, and Merari. And the sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar,

and Hebron, and Uzziel. And the children of Amram: Aaron, and Moses, and Miriam. The sons also of Aaron: Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.” There are four steps, Levi to Moses. Now are you going to say there were four generations between Levi and Moses? It’s conceivable if you have an extra-long time between the generations, however, it brings up a whole other problem. If you look at Numbers 3:39 where you have the census figures of the Israelites at the time of the exodus at the time of Moses. You read “All that were numbered of the Levites, which Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, throughout their families, all the males from a month old and upward, *were* twenty and two thousand.”

All right if you have four generations from Levi to Moses can you end up in the time of Moses with 22,000 Levites? That is quite a process of multiplication. Now let me add a caution here because I don’t want to play both ends of the string. We’re going to discuss those census figures of Numbers. At the beginning of the book of Numbers as well you know, it represents its own problem as to how to understand some of those census figures. The total that is given, let me see if I can find that verse, in chapter 1 verse 46 of Numbers, “Even all they that were numbered were 603,550.” That’s 600 or so thousand males twenty year olds and up, not including females and not including children and from that 600 plus thousand you can multiply that by three or four and you’re going to be up to a couple million. We’ll discuss that whole problem later. I’m kind of inclined to think there is a problem here that is hard to discuss in a few minutes. It seems like there were a substantial number of Levites for only four links of genealogy. It seems as if those four links of genealogy are compressed and that you have “son of” there as meaning descendent.

If you compare 1 Chronicles 6:3-14 with Ezra 7:1-5, the parallel genealogies, what you will find is if you compare them that there are 6 names omitted in the Ezra genealogy. So you can still trace line of descent without including all the links, it’s no contradiction, it is just part of the nature of biblical

genealogies that they do not always include all the links. The purpose is line of descent, not a complete record.

Then further illustration in one already mentioned back in Matthew 1:1 “Jesus Christ son of David.” Later in Matthew 1 you get a larger more detailed genealogy, which gives us 42 links but even there we don’t have a full one. So if you compare the genealogies, you will find that there are gaps there as well. So the point is that “abridgement is the general rule in biblical genealogy.” The purpose of the genealogies is line of descent and you don’t need all the links in order to trace line of descent.

4. The Numbers Introduced into These Genealogies May Give an Impression of Having Chronological Significance but in Reality They Have No Bearing on this

And so we come back to Warfield and Green’s article, proposition 3. “The genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 have a different purpose than chronological, their purpose is to show lines of descent.” Number 4. “the numbers introduced into these genealogies may give an impression of having chronological significance, but in reality they have no bearing, on this.” They simply serve to indicate life span and the age at which childbearing began. Warfield says when we’re told that a man, was 130 years old when he had begotten his heir and he lived after that 800 years producing sons and daughters, dying at the age of 930 years, all these items cooperate to make a vivid impression upon us of a bigger and grander humanity in those days of the world. Green says “Why are we told how long each patriarch lived after the birth of his son and what was the entire length of his life? These numbers are given with the same regularity as the age of the birth of his son. They are of no use in making up a chronology of a period. They merely afford us a conspectus of individual lives. For this reason it is doubtless that they are recorded in these selected examples of the original term of human life. They show what it was in the ages before the flood, they show how it was afterwards gradually narrowed down but in order to do this it was not necessary that every individual

should be named in the line from Adam to Noah and from Noah to Abraham or anything approaching it. A series of special lives with the appropriate numbers attached was all that was required. So far as appears this is all that was given us. The notion of basing a chronological computation upon these genealogies is a fundamental mistake. Putting them for a purpose, they were not designed to subserve from the method of construction they are not well suited for.”

Example – Gen. 11:10

Now, for example, if we look at Genesis 11:10 which is just arbitrarily selected by Green but by the purpose to give you a conspectus, an idea, of the length of life and the age of childbearing. He would be certain that that was accurate, but that just tells you something about individual lives it doesn't tell you about the chronology of the period. You don't know how many links are included in them. The age gradually narrows down, to Abraham 175. I was going to say to illustrate that further, if you look at Genesis 11:10 you read these are the generations of Shem, “These *are* the generations of Shem: Shem *was* one hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood: And Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat Salah: And Arphaxad lived after he begat Salah four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters. And Salah lived thirty years, and begat Eber.” He continues to live 500 years and he begets four sons and daughters, but at the age of one hundred he becomes the ancestor. Now the point is, you don't know whether he is five generations removed from Shem or ten generations or a hundred generations. You just don't know that. You can't tell that from the terminology.

All we know is that he may have given birth to someone we don't know, then in turn he lived a hundred years than gave birth to somebody else. We don't know for sure who in turn gave birth to Arphaxad. You see there may be gaps. You still would say to Shem that he is a hundred years old and begat Arphaxad

even though that's the case directly. Look at that example in Genesis 11; you follow the way it's constructed. So I think what we would say to make it clear is Shem became the ancestor of Arphaxad two years before the flood." We can't tell if he was the immediate ancestor or whether there were a number of links in between. He could have been born from a descendent of Shem and trace his line back to this point when Shem was 100, you can't tell. If there weren't links in between then you don't know how old Shem was. He could have been dead and gone by the time Arphaxad was born.

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