

Genesis, Lecture 3

Primeval Period, Genealogies & Chronology / Impact of Archaeology

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Abstract

This lecture discusses the impact of archaeological research on Old Testament historicity, particularly countering the skepticism of Julius Wellhausen. It explores the proper balance and theological use of archaeology, cautioning against overreliance on physical evidence to prove or disprove Scripture. The core of the lecture focuses on primeval chronology in Genesis 5 and 11, presenting five propositions from William Henry Green and B. B. Warfield to argue that these genealogies are not meant for chronological calculations. Finally, it analyzes key terms like 'beget,' 'bear,' and 'son' to show that genealogical abridgment is a standard biblical practice for tracing lines of descent rather than providing complete historical timelines.

Outline

I. Archaeology and Old Testament Historicity

- A. Impact of Archaeological Study on skepticism
 1. General archaeological discoveries substantiate biblical history
 2. Countering the skepticism of Julius Wellhausen (who wrote when archaeology was in its infancy)
- B. Nature of Archaeological Corroboration
 1. High cultures and sophistication in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia
 2. General vs. Specific Corroborations
 - a. General: showing Egyptians knew how to write in 2700 B.C. (disproving 19th-century claims that writing was unknown in Moses' time)
 - b. Specific: lack of direct, identical matches for every biblical narrative on the ground
3. Cautions and Balance in using Archaeology
 - a. Critical discernment is required to avoid putting Scripture at the disposal of archaeologists
 - b. Avoid claiming archaeology "proves" the Bible, as critics can use subsequent archaeological finds to argue against it
 - c. General confirmation vs. concrete, absolute mathematical proof
- C. Scripture as the Foundation of Faith
 1. J. Gresham Machen on Scripture as the foundation of religious experience

2. The reciprocal relationship between Scripture and personal faith
3. The role of the Holy Spirit
 - a. Works through the Scriptures and normal rational thought, not apart from them
 - b. Undermining Scripture reliability leads to intellectual objections and loss of faith
4. Rejecting subjectivism (avoiding placing subjective experience as the foundation of truth)

II. The Primeval Period and Chronological Relationships

A. Characteristics of Old Testament History Writing

1. Differs from modern Western standards of chronological precision
2. Chronology is not always explicitly treated or considered of primary importance in early biblical narratives
 - a. Case of Abraham: introduced in Genesis 12 without explicit dates or placement in extra-biblical history
 - b. Case of Israel's duration in Egypt: difficult to specify with absolute chronological certainty
3. Unspecified chronological periods before Abraham
 - a. Adam to Noah (the Flood)
 - b. Noah to Abraham

B. Genealogies of Genesis 5 and Genesis 11

1. Tracing the line from Adam to Noah (Genesis 5) and Noah to Abraham (Genesis 11)
2. The invalidity of utilizing these genealogies for chronological calculations
3. Core works on primeval chronology:
 - a. William Henry Green, "Primeval Chronology" (Bibliotheca Sacra, 1890)
 - b. B.B. Warfield, "The Antiquity and Unity of the Human Race" (Princeton Theological Review, 1911)

C. Five Propositions of Green and Warfield

1. Proposition 1: The idea that man is of recent origin has no basis in Scripture
 - a. Human antiquity has no intrinsic theological significance
 - b. The supposed conflict between biblical chronology and scientific speculation is factitious
 - c. The Bible does not assign a brief span to human history, except through faulty interpretation
2. Proposition 2: The attempt to date the creation of man from biblical genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 is an invalid procedure
 - a. Traditional assumption of a paltry 6,000-year history for the human race
 - b. Archbishop James Ussher's chronological scheme (1650, placed in Bible margins since 1701, dating creation to 4004 B.C.)
 - c. Drawing chronological inferences from genealogical tables is highly precarious
3. Proposition 3: The genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 have a different purpose than chronology

- a. The primary purpose is to show lines of descent, not to provide a continuous timeline
 - b. Complete records of every generation are not required to trace lines of descent
 - c. Biblical genealogies are freely compressed for various purposes
 - d. Gaps in genealogies: a recorded ten-link genealogy may actually span hundreds or thousands of generations
4. Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Genealogical Terminology
- a. "Bear" (female) and "Beget" (male): can mean becoming the ancestor of a person, rather than immediate parenting
 - b. "Son": frequently means a descendant rather than an immediate son
 - i. Matthew 1:1: "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" shows a highly compressed genealogy
 - ii. Genesis 46:16-18: "sons of Zilpah" includes immediate sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons
5. Abridgement as the General Rule in Biblical Genealogies
- a. Compatibility with tracing lines of descent without every single link
 - b. 1 Chronicles 26:24: Shebuel the "son" of Gershom, "son" of Moses (representing a ~400-year gap)
 - c. 1 Chronicles 6:1-3 (Levi to Moses in four steps) compared to Numbers 3:39 (census of 22,000 Levites)
 - d. Ezra 7:1-5 compared with 1 Chronicles 6 (six names omitted in Ezra's version)
6. Proposition 4: The numbers introduced in the genealogies do not have chronological significance
- a. Numbers serve to show lifespans and the age of childbearing, not to formulate a continuous timeline
 - b. Provides a general conspectus of individual lives and shows the gradual narrowing of human lifespan
 - c. Genesis 11:10: Analysis of Shem and Arphaxad demonstrating possible gaps between genealogical links