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The Lifespans of the Patriarchs: Schematic Orderings in the Chrono-genealogy

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Abstract

A remarkable numerical schema is revealed when the lifespan notices for the generations from Adam to Moses in the Masoretic version of the Pentateuch are added together - 12,600 years. It is suggested that this schema has eschatological connotations that relates to the 1,260 days mentioned in Daniel and Revelation. The possibility that the lifespan notices developed from an earlier, progenitor chronology that originally tallied 12,000 years is also discussed, and the relationship between this schema, the surrounding patriarchal narratives and other Near East chronological traditions is examined in terms of the textual development of the Old Testament lifespan tradition.

The Old Testament is replete with chronological information about the people and events of Israel's mytho-historical past. Genesis, for example, provides extensive chronological details for the genealogical line from Adam to Jacob, including the age of begetting for each patriarch's firstborn son and the number of years they lived afterwards - figures that, when added together, comprise the respective patriarch's lifespan. With regard to the ages of begetting, previous research has shown that this information forms a sophisticated timeline of Israelite history that, according to one line of theory, is fundamentally schematic in form.¹ The lifespan information on the other hand (with the exception of isolated lifespan figures such as Lamech's age of 777 years and Enoch's lifespan of 365 years), has been seen to have little overall schematic significance.² Instead, scholars have concerned themselves with the question of why Old Testament writers postulated such

1 M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies* (New York 1988); J. Hughes, *Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology* (*JSOTSup*, 66; Sheffield 1990); J. Northcote, "The Schematic Development of Old Testament Chronography: Towards an Integrated Model", *JSOT* 29 (2004), pp. 3-36.

2 Two notable exceptions are studies of mathematical patterns in the patriarch chronology by N. Sarna and more recently by D. W. Young. See N. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York 1970), p.84; and D. W. Young, "The Sexagesimal Basis for the Total Years of the Antediluvian and Postdiluvian Epochs", *ZAW* 116 (2004), pp. 502-527.

excessive lifespans, with comparisons often made to the vast eras contained in the Sumerian king lists.³

Scholars have failed to detect, however, an intriguing schema that becomes apparent when all the Masoretic Text (MT) patriarch lifespan figures are summed together - yielding a total that is precisely 12,600 years from Adam to Moses. It will be suggested that the 12,600 numerical schema represents an eschatological tradition that is associated with the ‘time, times and a half’ period of final reckoning mentioned in Daniel and Revelation. It will also be suggested that the lifespan figures were adapted from an earlier chronology that accorded with a 12,000-year schema. This schema centered on the Josephite line rather than the Mosaic line, and may have had its roots in Zoroastrian apocalyptic traditions that postulated a 12,000-year duration of the world. Finally, it will be shown that the Greek (LXX) and proto-Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) traditions eventually dispensed with a schematic form by modifying the lifespan chronology for various rational and historical purposes.

The 12,600 accumulative lifespan

Obtaining the total of 12,600 years from the lifespan figures is quite a straightforward matter. One simply sums together the lifespan figures for the generations in the ancestral line from Adam to Moses (Gen v; Gen xi; Gen xxv 7; Gen xxxv 28; Gen xlvi 28; Exod vi 16-20; Deut xxxiv 7) as shown in Table 1.

PATRIARCHS	AGE	PATRIARCHS	AGE
1. Adam	930	14. Eber	464
2. Seth	912	15. Peleg	239
3. Enosh	905	16. Reu	239
4. Kenon	910	17. Serug	230
5. Mahalalel	895	18. Nahor	148
6. Jared	962	19. Terah	205
7. Enoch	365	20. Abraham	175
8. Methuselah	969	21. Isaac	180
9. Lamech	777	22. Jacob	147
10. Noah	950	23. Levi	137
11. Shem	600	24. Kohath	133
12. Arpachshad	438	25. Amram	137
13. Shelah	433	26. Moses	120
		<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>12,600</i>

Table 1. The 12,600 lifespan total of the Mosaic Line

3 J. Opper, “Chronology (I)”, in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York 1906), pp. 64-68, 66; S. J. De Vries, “Chronology of the Old Testament”, *IDB* (Nashville 1962), pp. 580-89, 581-2; E.A. Speiser, *Genesis (AB)*; Garden City 1964), p. xlii.

What is the significance of 12,600 years and, more specifically, why does this figure present itself at the conclusion of life of the key patriarch in the Old Testament – that of Moses? Additionally, we might ask who composed this chronology, why was it included in the Pentateuch and when was it composed? Although answers to these questions are by no means straightforward, there are enough clues in the Old Testament itself, as well as in early Near Eastern religious and historical literature, to piece together some likely possibilities.

There are two biblical texts that stand out as significant in uncovering the meaning of the 12,600 numerical schema in early Jewish theology – Daniel and Revelation. In these texts the figure 1260 received prominent attention, referring to a period of three-and-a-half luni-solar years (of 360-days each) or 42 months. In Dan xii 7, the period of ‘time, times, and a half’ (often interpreted to refer to 3½ years, or 1260 days) marks the interval until the ‘wonders’ of the end-times shall cease and the dead shall arise to ‘everlasting life.’ In Revelation Christian writers expanded the significance of the 1,260-day period, with the period (also referred to variously as 42 months and three-and-a-half years) marking a number of significant events associated with the end-times: the trampling of the outer court by the Gentiles (Rev xi 2); the prophecising of the two witnesses who are killed by the beast (Rev xi 3-13); the sheltering in the wilderness of the woman who had given birth to a son destined for greatness (Rev xii 14); and the period of worshipping the beast from the sea (Rev xiii 5).

While scholars tend to relate the apocalyptic traditions in these books to symbolic statements about political events occurring at the time of their composition, some scholars have argued that the basic structure for these apocalyptic motifs are derived from earlier OT traditions.⁴ In particular, parallels between the narrative structure of Revelation and that of Exodus are often made.⁵ Moses led the Israelites to the Promised Land, much as Christ is foretold to lead the anointed into the kingdom of heaven. It is perhaps not surprising in this respect that it is the song of Moses that will be sung in heaven in the final days (Rev xv 3). Later Jewish traditions even came to describe Moses as one of two prophets who would return in the ‘final days’ to guide the chosen remnant to ever-lasting life, a tradition that is perhaps evident in Matt xvii 3; Mark ix 4 and Luke ix 30.⁶ It is generally contended that the two witnesses of Rev xi are described in terms of Moses and Elijah.⁷ The woman sheltering in the wilderness, who is said to bear a crown of twelve stars (Rev xii 1) and is given ‘wings of the great eagle’ (Rev xii

4 E.g., J. N. Musvosvi, “The Issue of Genre and Apocalyptic Prophecy”, *AASS* 5 (2002), pp. 43-60.

5 G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation (NCBC)* (London 1974), 155; J. M. Ford, *Revelation (AB)* (Garden City 1975), pp. 257ff; R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh 1993), pp. 204-205.

6 Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 186.

7 Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 177; Ford, *Revelation*, p. 178; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 208, 275-277.

14), has been seen to allude to the twelve tribes of Israel in the wilderness who were metaphorically carried forth on eagles' wings (Exod xix 4).⁸ The worshipping of the beast has its corollary in the worshipping of the Golden Calf in the wilderness (Exod xxxii), and the trampling of the outer court by Gentiles recalls the period that the Israelites were forced to wait while other 'nations' in possession of the Promised Land were driven off (Exod xxiii 28ff.).

There is also a strong connection between the Exodus tradition and the number forty-two. In Num xxxiii, forty-two stages are listed between Egypt and the Promised Land, and the LXX version of Josh v 6 states that the Israelites spent forty-two years wandering in the wilderness (in contrast to the forty years stated in the Hebrew tradition). Hence, there would seem to be a direct correspondence between the duration of the Exodus and the forty-two months (i.e. 1260 days) of the later eschatological tradition. We might also note that according to Matt i 17, forty-two generations elapsed from Abraham to the birth of Jesus, which M. J. Moreton relates to the forty-two months of Dan xii 7.⁹

Finally, mention should be made of the Qumran document commonly referred to as the 'War Scroll' (1QM). According to this c.1st century BCE document, the Sons of Light shall fight against the Sons of Darkness in the final days for a period of 35 years.¹⁰ Employing the Jewish luni-solar calendar of the 360-day year, 35 years equals 12,600 days. This again suggests an apocalyptic theme underpinning the 12,600 numerical schema, which both Jewish sectarian and early Christian writers seem to have been familiar with.

It has been suggested that the period of three-and-a-half years traditionally represented a period of affliction.¹¹ The manner in which Luke iv 25 and James v 17 refer to the famine of 1 Kgs xviii 1 as being three-and-a-half years in duration is seen as evidence of this tradition among early Christians. According to Gunkel, the three-and-a-half motif represents the three-and-a-half months from the middle of Kislew to the end of Adar - that is, from the winter solstice to the festival of Marduk in the Babylonian calendar. This is the period of the supremacy of Tiamat, the Babylonian sea monster of chaos, before Marduk's victory over the beast.¹² Could the three-and-a-half saros period of the lifespan chronology (a saros being a Babylonian period consisting of 3,600 years) correspond to a period of trial for Israel's ancestors before their settlement of Israel, which was metaphorically described in Psalm lxxiv 14 as a victory over the sea monster Leviathan?

Although these associations are interesting, we cannot be certain what significance ancient chronologers attached to the 12,600-year lifespan schema. In particular, we need to be cautious in equating the 12,600-year period with an actual

8 Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 205; Ford, *Revelation*, pp. 197, 201.

9 M. J. Moreton, "The Genealogy of Jesus", *TU* 87 (1964).

10 F. Martinez and E. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition*, Vol. 1 (Leiden 1997) p. 115.

11 C. R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids 2001), p. 107.

12 H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (Goettingen 1895), pp. 309ff. Cited in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York 1906), p. 348.

time period, as this would be inconsistent with the fact that lifespans, when added together, do not refer to time-periods *per se*. Only generational figures, in the form of age of begetting notices, can constitute time-periods. On the other hand, there are those who have suggested that the lifespan figures do, in fact, represent the true chronology and not the ages of begetting. One of the more interesting versions of this theory – but not one that is likely in my opinion – is the tribal hypothesis, which posits that each patriarch represents a reigning dynasty.¹³ Hence the family of Adam is considered to have reigned 930 years, after which the Seth dynasty reigned 912 years, and so on.

An advantage of the tribal hypothesis is that it provides a plausible explanation for the excessive life-spans assigned to the patriarchs, and also overcomes some inconsistencies, such as that presented by the fact that, according to the MT, it took only four generations - the generations of Levi, Kohath, Amram and Moses - to tally the 430 years the Israelites spent in Egypt stated in Exod xii 40.¹⁴ If we suppose that Levi was 57 years old when he entered Egypt - his remaining 80 years + 133 years of Kohath's life + 137 years of Amram's life + 80 years of Moses' life (his age at the time of the exodus) equals 430 years.¹⁵

Although there is evidence for the equation of patriarchal names to tribal names in the Old Testament (e.g., Gen x, xlix), the manner in which the patriarchs are presented in the narrative is clearly that of distinct individuals. Also, there is an alternative explanation for the four-generations of the Exodus period - the generations of Levi, Kohath and Amram were inserted at a time when the MT read 430 years for the period in Canaan and Egypt *together* (as per LXX and SP), rather than for Egypt alone. In other words, the period in Egypt was reckoned at this time as 215 years, a calculation that was likely present in the proto-MT text during the 3rd – 2nd century BCE.¹⁶ This explanation would accord much better with the enumeration of just four generations during this period, which would be a reasonable calculation for 215 years. If this is a correct assessment, then it indicates

13 J. D. Davis, "Chronology", *A Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. J. D. Davis) (Grand Rapids 1924), pp. 133-34; B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids 1954), pp. 341-42; J. O. Buswell, Jr. *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, Vol.1 (Grand Rapids 1962); W. V. Ault, "Antediluvians", *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol.1 (ed. M. C. Tenney) (Grand Rapids 1975), pp. 172-77; J. A. Borland, "Did People Live to be Hundreds of Years Old Before the Flood?", *The Genesis Debate* (ed. R. F. Youngblood) (Grand Rapids 1990), pp. 174-175.

14 De Vries, "Chronology of the Old Testament," p. 582; S. Kreuzer, "430 Jahre, 400 Jahre oder 4 Generationen – Zu den Zeitangaben über den Ägyptenaufenthalt der 'Israeliten'," *ZAW* 98 (S) (1986), pp. 199-210; J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch* (New York 1992), p. 40.

15 Given that Joseph was 39 when his family entered Egypt and his brothers were conceived over a 20-year period before him, with Levi being the third-born as stated in Gen xxix 34, the age of Levi being 57 years when he entered Egypt might seem conceivable. However, Gen xxix 30-31 indicates that Leah gave birth to her four sons after Jacob's seven-year service for her hand in marriage had ended and he had already begun service for Rachel, in which case Levi could not be 18 years older than Joseph, but must have been less than 13 years older.

16 D. W. Bousset, "Das Chronologische System der biblischen Geschichtsbücher", *ZAW* 20 (1900), pp. 136-47.

that the lifespans from Levi to Moses were composed in the 3rd – 2nd century BCE when the 215-year period for the captivity was enumerated in the proto-MT, and were not meant to correspond to chronological periods associated with ancestral ‘tribes’.¹⁷

The Progenitor Josephite Lifespan Chronology

While it is the view here that the 12,600-year total was probably a relatively late addition to the Pentateuch, it is also likely that the chronologer was reworking a set of lifespan figures that drew from an earlier chronological tradition. The postulation of an earlier lifespan chronology is consistent with the line of research that suggests that the Pentateuch chrono-genealogy evolved over several centuries between the 7th Century BCE and the 2nd Century BCE, and that divergences between the surviving Pentateuch traditions (namely the MT, SP and LXX) were derived from a progenitor version.¹⁸ In order to reconstruct the possible form that this progenitor version took, it is instructive to undertake a comparative examination of the surviving versions and reconstruct possible developments.

There are several places in the three surviving OT textual traditions where the figures for the lifespans of the patriarchs differ, as can be discerned from Table 2.

PATRIARCH	MT	LXX	SP	PATRIARCH	MT	LXX	SP
1. Adam	930	930	930				
2. Seth	912	912	912	14. Eber	464	504	404
3. Enosh	905	905	905	15. Peleg	239	339	239
4. Kenon	910	910	910	16. Reu	239	339	239
5. Mahalalel	895	895	895	17. Serug	230	330	230
6. Jared	962	962	847	18. Nahor	148	208	148
7. Enoch	365	365	365	19. Terah	205	205	145
8. Methuselah	969	969	720	20. Abraham	175	175	175
9. Lamech	777	753	653	21. Isaac	180	180	180
10. Noah	950	950	950	22. Jacob	147	147	147
11. Shem	600	600	600	23. Levi	137	137	137
12. Arpachshad	438	615	438	24. Kohath	133	130	133
Cainan		460		25. Amram	137	136	132
13. Shelah	433	460	433	26. Moses	120	120	120

Table 2. Comparison of lifespan notices between OT traditions

The clue for reconstructing the progenitor chronology lies in the general concordance between the MT and SP’s lifespan figures. We can see from Table 2 that there is a much closer affiliation between the SP’s and MT’s figures than between those of the LXX. In fact, the only figures that differ between the SP and

17 For discussion of the presence of the 215-year captivity period in the 3rd–2nd century BCE proto-MT, see Northcote, “The Schematic Development of Old Testament Chronography.”

18 Northcote, “The Schematic Development of Old Testament Chronography.”

MT are those for Jared, Methuselah, Lamech, Eber, Terah and Amram. The lifespan figures found in the SP for Jared and Methuselah can be readily dismissed as an obvious attempt to enable the generations to die prior to the flood (in the SP their deaths conveniently coincide with the flood). This scenario accords with Gen vi 7 that speaks of the flood destroying all life except for Noah's family and the animals they bring with them into the ark. The SP lifespan figures for Jared and Methuselah were presumably originally the same as the MT/LXX's figures, but were whittled down so that this inconsistency could be avoided.¹⁹

The remaining ante-diluvian lifespan in dispute is that of Lamech. According to Ralph Klein, the LXX has preserved the original lifespan for Lamech.²⁰ However, the LXX figure exceeds the SP's by exactly 100 years, which is consistent with a general inflation by a century evident in other lifespans (namely for Eber, Peleg, Reu and Serug). The MT's figure of 777 years is obviously schematic and, given that the other MT figures (Enoch's lifespan aside) are not similarly schematic, it is probable that the MT's figure for Lamech's lifespan was a later insertion.²¹ This leaves the SP's figure of 653 years. The problem in accepting the SP's figure for Lamech's lifespan as the most archaic is that it raises the question of why Lamech would originally die in the year of the flood, but not Jared and Methuselah? Is it not more likely that Lamech's original lifespan was higher, and then whittled down to resolve the discrepancy with the flood date much as Jared and Methuselah's ages were? This assumes, however, that the flood date was already established at this time. It also assumes that the original lifespan chronologer would have given the same amount of attention to ensuring consistency between the flood date and earlier generations as he/she did with Noah's father. The position taken here is that the SP's figure for Lamech is probably original.

With regard to the post-diluvian generations, only the lifespan figures for Eber and Terah differ between the MT and SP texts. For the age for Eber, the SP probably preserves the more archaic figure, given that it is precisely 100 years less than the LXX's inflated figure. For Terah, the SP seems to have reduced the lifespan figure to 145 years to accord with the fact that Terah fathered Abram at the age of 70 while Abram departed for Canaan at the age of 75 soon after his father died.²² The MT/LXX's figure of 205 for Terah's death is grossly inconsistent with this departure narrative, as it implies that Terah was still alive when Abram departed, and for this reason it can be seen to be the original figure, having developed before it was joined to the departure narrative.

19 Klein, "Archaic Chronologies and the Textual History of the Old Testament," p. 261.

20 Klein, "Archaic Chronologies and the Textual History of the Old Testament," p. 261.

21 Enoch's lifespan is seen to be based on the Mesopotamian tradition of Enmeduranki, king of Sippar, city of the sun god Shamash. The king, much like Enoch, was the founder of the guild of priest-diviners. See Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch*, p. 72.

22 Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 79; Klein, "Archaic Chronologies and the Textual History of the Old Testament," p. 258.

Taking the above adjustments into consideration, we can reconstruct the entire progenitor lifespan list as shown in Table 3.

Patriarch	Progenitor	Patriarch	Progenitor
1. Adam	930	14. Eber	404
2. Seth	912	15. Peleg	239
3. Enosh	905	16. Reu	239
4. Kenon	910	17. Serug	230
5. Mahalalel	895	18. Nahor	148
6. Jared	962	19. Terah	205
7. Enoch	365	20. Abraham	175
8. Methuselah	969	21. Isaac	180
9. Lamech	653	22. Jacob	147
10. Noah	950	23. Levi	137
11. Shem	600	24. Kohath	133
12. Arpachshad	438	25. Amram	137
13. Shelah	433	26. Moses	120
		<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>12,416</i>

Table 3. Reconstructed progenitor (Josephite) lifespan chronology

The lifespan total of 12,416 years is not a schematic figure by any reckoning. However, an interesting result is obtained when the generations from Levi onwards are ignored and the chrono-genealogy is terminated at the lifespan of Joseph, the father of the northern Samaritan tribes and the last generation listed in Genesis (1 22-26). If Joseph's 110-year lifespan is included in the place of his older brother Levi, the reconstructed lifespan chronology adds up to 11,999 years, or the 12,000th year.

The figure 12,000 is another important schematic number in early Judaic-Christian eschatological traditions. 12,000 is associated with the tribe of Joseph - indeed, with each of the 12 tribes of Israel - in Rev vii 8 as the number from each tribe who will be sealed and redeemed in the final days. Adding the tribes together produces the total of 144,000 (Rev vii 4; xiv 1), which corresponds to the number of months in a 12,000-year period. According to 1 Kgs vii 26, 144,000 is the volume (in logs) of 'the sea' (as the ritual bath or *mikvah* is called) of the first temple (one bath being equal to 72 log).²³ This bath is said to have stood on a base consisting of twelve oxen, probably representing the twelve tribes of Israel. In Revelation this imagery has been transposed to the 144,000 sealed servants (Rev xiv 1) who sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb (i.e. Jesus) next to the

23 2 Chron iv 5 notes that "the Sea was for the priests to wash in". Curiously, Chronicles gives different dimensions for the bath, stating a capacity of 3000 bath rather than 2000 bath.

glass ‘sea’ of fire (Rev xv 2-3).²⁴ The notion of the righteous being purified in a divine fire was a key element of Christ’s return (Luke iii 16).

It seems likely, then, that the Christian author of Revelation was drawing on an earlier Jewish chronological tradition centering on the 12,000/144,000 motif - one that, according to the reconstruction offered here, was central to the progenitor lifespan chronology. This chronological tradition was certainly extant in apocalyptic traditions throughout the ancient Near East. Zoroastrian tradition viewed the duration of the world as 12,000 years (*Bundahishn* I 42; xxxvi 1ff).²⁵ According to this tradition, the end of the 12,000-year period marks the cessation of the struggle between good and evil (which lasts for 6000 years), the raising of the dead and Judgement Day (*Bundahishn* xxxiii & xxxvi).²⁶

The notion that the 12,000/144,000 chronological motif was adopted by Jewish chronologers from the Indo-Iranian mytho-religious traditions is a tempting hypothesis. The most likely place of diffusion is Babylon during the Persian era (6th-4th centuries BCE). Several scholars contend that it was during this time, when the diasporic Jewish community flourished in that region, that Jewish writers came to be influenced by Zoroastrianism apocalyptic teachings.²⁷

Whatever the origin of the 12,000-year schema, the notion that there existed a pre-2nd century BCE apocalyptic tradition that culminated in the generation of Joseph is itself an intriguing thesis. The Babylonian Talmud (*Sukka* LIIa) identifies a descendant of Joseph as the first Messiah who shall lead the army of Israel in the final days. However, it is probably true that the preeminence of Joseph in the progenitor lifespan chronology was due to his story being simply the last in the patriarchal narratives, and that the 12,000-year schema was meant to apply to the whole pre-captivity period and the Israelite forefathers, not to Joseph alone.

The emergence of the 12,000-year lifespan chronology likely underwent the following developmental process (see Figure 1).

24 It has been suggested that the heavenly ‘sea’ corresponds to the Red Sea in which Pharaoh, represented by Leviathan, is defeated (Ford, *Revelation*, p. 257). Interestingly, the ritual bath in the First Temple has its counterpart with the bath (ta-am-tu) in the temple of Marduk at Babylon, which probably had its basis in the myth of Baal’s victory over Tiamat, the monster of the chaotic sea. See J. Gray, *I and II Kings: A Commentary* (London 1964), p. 177.

25 Also see Suidas’ “*Tyrrhenia*”, which refers to a Tyrrhenian writer who stated the duration of the world to be 12,000 years.

26 A 6000-year struggle between good and evil is also referred to by the 4th century BCE Greek historian Theopompus (cited in Plutarch’s 2nd century C.E. work, *On Isis and Osiris*, XLVII), and closely mirrors the Zoroastrian account.

27 J. R. Hinnells, “Iranian Influence on the New Testament”, *Acta Iranica* 2 (1974), pp. 271-284; R. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (London 1975) 21; S. Sanders, “Whence the First Millennium? The Sources Behind Revelation 20”, *New Testament Studies* 50 (2004), pp. 444-456.

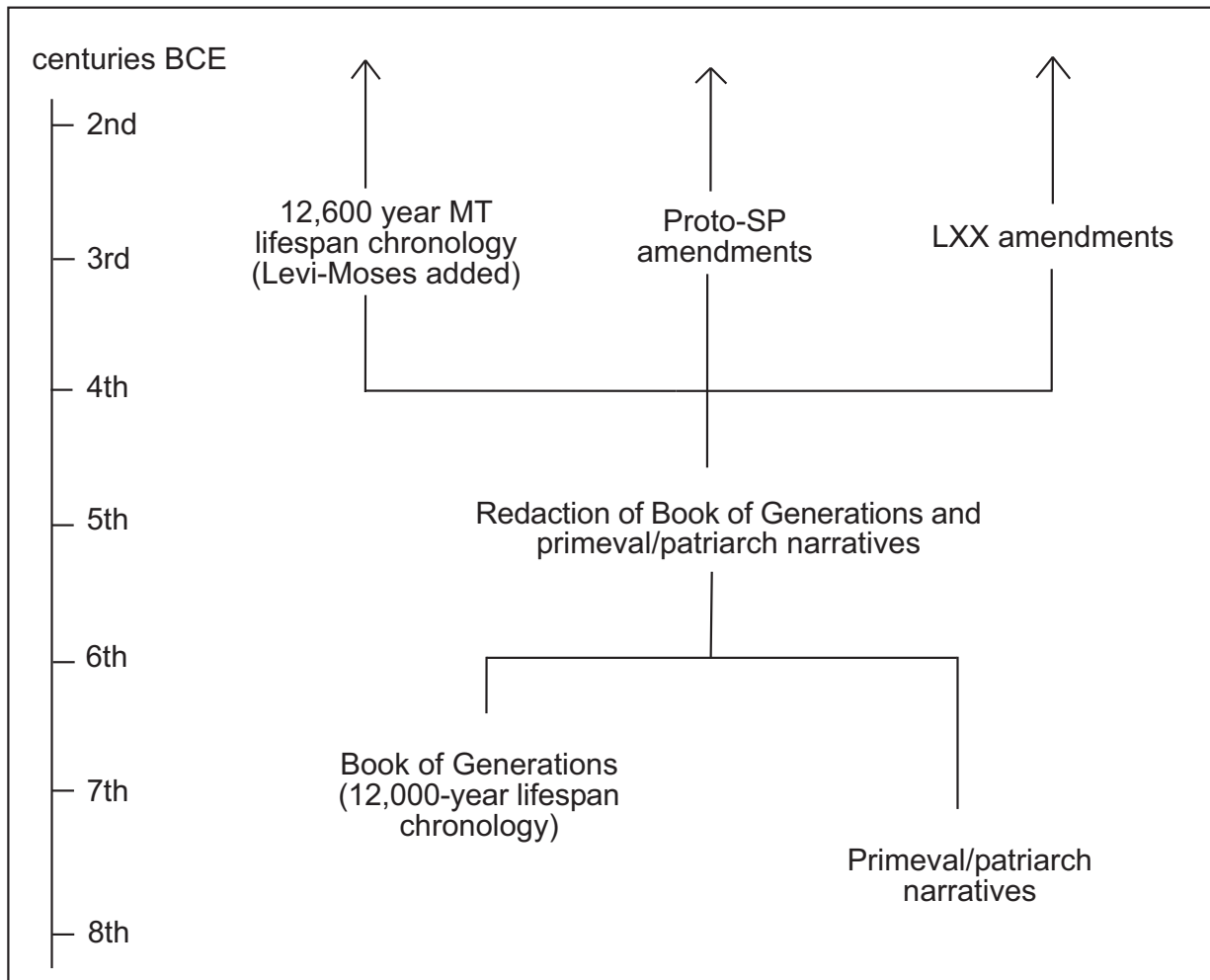


Figure 1. Postulated development of Lifespan Chronology

The lifespan chronology was probably originally part of the so-called ‘Book of Generations’ of Gen v 1, which had developed separately from the surrounding primeval and patriarch narratives. When the Book of Generations was integrated with the narrative traditions, the redaction resulted in several chronological inconsistencies between the lifespan chronology and the surrounding narratives, three of which are still evident:

1. In the MT, Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah and Eber would still have been alive when Terah died and Abram migrated to Canaan (Gen xi 32), which was inconsistent with the fact that none of these ancestors are mentioned in the narrative of Abram’s migration.²⁸
2. In the MT and LXX, it is suggested that a 75-year old Abram (Abraham) left Haran immediately following Terah’s death at the age of 205 (Gen xii 4), yet elsewhere in the same text Abram is stated to have been only 70 years younger than his father (Gen xi 26).²⁹

²⁸ R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids 1969).

²⁹ See Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 79.

3. With Isaac being stated to die at the age of 180 (Gen xxxv 28), it meant that he would have still been alive when Joseph entered Egypt, which is inconsistent with the narrative that documents his death prior to this event, unless we posit the story of Joseph's misfortunes as a flashback.³⁰

Each of these inconsistencies can be attributed to the poor synthesis of the chronogenealogy to the patriarch narratives that took place during the redaction process.

The most likely date of composition for the progenitor lifespan chronology is at the time of the composition of the age of begetting chronology in the 7th century BCE.³¹ In the 3rd-2nd century BCE, adjustments were made to the 12,000-year lifespan chronology in the various textual traditions that emerged from the progenitor text. The MT chronologers adjusted Lamech's lifespan to 777 in the course of adding lifespan figures from Levi to Moses and producing the 12,600-year schema. The number 777, according to some scholars, represents perfection, and later was contrasted with 666, the number representing wickedness in Revelation.³²

Meanwhile, the SP made its own modifications in order to rationalise various discrepancies. Jared's and Methuselah's lifespans were altered so that their deaths would coincide with the time of the flood, and Terah's lifespan was altered so that his death would coincide with the time of Abram's/Abraham's migration. As for the LXX, Lamech's, Eber's, Peleg's, Reu's, Serug's and Nahor's lifespans were increased by the same amount that their ages of begetting increased (without deducting these increases from the years lived after begetting), and increased Arpachshad's and Shelah's lifespans for reasons unknown. The intention of the LXX chronologer was probably to extend the age of begetting notices to accord with a 5000-year historical era, which in turn extended the lifespan totals.³³

The result of these modifications is that in the SP and LXX the lifespan totals do not conform to an overall schema (although it must be said that the SP's total of 11,987 comes very close to the progenitor's total of 11,999). Certainly, in

30 The finding that Isaac would have been alive at the time of Joseph's transportation to Egypt is based on the following line of deductive reasoning. According to Gen xlvii 9, Jacob was 130 years old when Joseph was 39 years old (i.e. 30 years old when appointed governor as per Gen. xli 46, plus seven years of plenty as per Gen xli 47, plus two years of drought as per Gen xlv 6). This means that Jacob begat Joseph at the age of 91. With Joseph being 17 years old when he was carried off to Egypt (Gen xxxvii 2), this would put Jacob at the age 108 at the time. Now, Isaac begat Jacob at the age of 60 (Gen xxv 26), which means that Isaac was 168 years of age when Joseph entered Egypt, with 12 years still to live of his 180-year lifespan.

31 For a discussion on the date of the progenitor chronology, see Jepsen, "Zur Chronologie des Priesterkodex; also Northcote, "The Schematic Development of Old Testament Chronography."

32 Ford, *Revelation*, p. 330. Speiser, however, speculates that Lamech's life-span of 777 years may be related to Lamech's boast that if Cain received 7-fold vengeance, then he would receive 77-fold vengeance (Gen iv 24). See Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 43.

33 Northcote, "The Schematic Development of Old Testament Chronography," p. 19.

the case of the LXX (with its unremarkable total of 13,636), no schematic purpose is evident. By this time, it seems that the schematic importance of the lifespan chronology in the non-MT textual traditions had largely disappeared.

Conclusion

The available evidence indicates that the lifespan figures in the Pentateuch accord with numerical schemas that held considerable eschatological significance in early Judean traditions. It has been suggested that a 12,000 Josephite lifespan chronology was composed from the 7th century BCE in accordance with Zoroastrian views concerning the duration of the world. Some time around the 3rd century BCE this chronology was modified to accord with the 12,600-lifespan chronology that is clearly evident in the surviving MT textual tradition. This later chronologer seems to have been keen to continue the lifespan eschatological tradition, but preferred to associate it with Moses rather than Joseph. The significance associated with both the 12,000 and 12,600 lifespan chronologies eventually found its way into the eschatological traditions contained in Daniel and Revelation.

The manner in which the OT chronologers incorporated such grand schemas in the chrono-genealogical lists is yet further evidence of the complex symbolism characteristic of early Judaic thought, of which only tantalizing fragments remain scattered in the surviving manuscripts. The difficulty involved in understanding this material is not surprising, given that the ancient chronologers seem to have not wanted their numerical symbolism to be made too accessible. In its day, in fact, full comprehension of it was likely restricted to small ‘inner’ priestly circles, with only hints of its meaning passed on in the canonical literature. In this respect, we are left to ponder the significance of the following passage from Deuteronomy xxxii 7: “...[C]onsider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee”. Two millennia later, the ‘years of many generations’ still remain poorly understood to the novice inquirer. But clues to their character and purpose are gradually being deciphered, and the chrono-genealogical material may yet prove to be an important source of information about the nature of early Judaic-Christian sectarian belief and literature development.