

Methuselah's Begetting Age in Genesis 5:25 and the Primeval Chronology of the Septuagint: A Closer Look at the Textual and Historical Evidence

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Abstract

Most young-earth creationists who view the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 as yielding a continuous chronology from the creation of Adam to the birth of Abraham claim that the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) preserves the original begetting ages given to Moses by Yahweh. Calculations derived from the MT yield a timespan for this period of about 2008 years. The Greek Septuagint (LXX) yields a chronology for this era of 3394 years, 1386 years greater than the MT. In some LXX manuscripts of Genesis 5:25, Methuselah was 167 years old when he fathered Lamech, placing Methuselah's death 14 years beyond the Deluge. This obvious problem often leads to a swift dismissal of any possibility that the LXX might preserve the original begetting ages and remaining years of life for each named patriarch in Genesis 5 and 11. This article will examine this issue and advance four main points: (1) the figure of 187 for Methuselah is original to the LXX translation and to Moses; (2) the reading of 167 in certain manuscripts of the LXX is a scribal error which occurred early in its complex transmissional history; (3) the appearance of 167 in some LXX manuscripts does not automatically negate the overall validity of the LXX's primeval chronology; and (4) numerous lines of historical and textual evidence suggest the young-earth creation community should remain open and willing to contemplate the strong likelihood that the primeval chronology of the LXX reflects most of the numbers that Moses originally recorded in Genesis 5 and 11.

Keywords: Primeval Chronology, Genesis 5 and 11, Septuagint, Masoretic Text, Samaritan Pentateuch, Methuselah, Josephus, Book of Jubilees

Brief Background

The numerical divergences found in the three textual witnesses of Genesis 5 and 11 (MT, LXX, and the Samaritan Pentateuch [SP])¹ have been the subject of debate for at least 17 centuries. Each

textual tradition yields a different chronology from the creation of Adam to the birth of Abraham (table 1).² Eusebius (AD260–340) is the first known author to explicitly cite and discuss the divergences, followed by Ephraem of Syria (AD306–373),^{3,4}

¹ The term "proto-MT" will sometimes be used in this article to refer to the Hebrew textual tradition that existed prior to the Masoretic (AD600–900), but is the (close) ancestor of the MT. The exact summation figure from Adam to Abraham in the LXX (3394 or 3264 years) depends on the exclusion or inclusion of Kainan, who appears in all ancient manuscripts of LXX Genesis 11:13b–14b, and in most MSS of Luke 3:36. Sarfati has argued against Kainan's inclusion in both Luke 3:36 and Genesis 11 (2004, 41–43). Mills has argued for his inclusion (1978). Ancient authors such as Julius Africanus, Theophilus of Antioch, and Eusebius did not include Kainan, but argued for the priority of the LXX's primeval chronology, demonstrating that Kainan is not essential to an argument for the LXX's chronology in Genesis 5 and 11 (Tanner 2015, 33–35). Josephus does not even mention Kainan, but presents the longer chronology as well. It is not my goal to resolve the debate about Kainan here.

² For an excellent presentation of the possible date-ranges based on the three witnesses, see Hardy and Carter (2014).

³ Ephraem of Syria is the first known ancient source to explicitly argue that the Jewish rabbis of the second century AD deflated the primeval chronology by ca. 1300 years in their Hebrew MSS for the purpose of discrediting Jesus as the Christ: "The Jews have subtracted 600 years [in Genesis 5] from the generations of Adam, Seth, etc., in order that their own books might not convict them concerning the coming of CHRIST: he having been predicted to appear for the deliverance of mankind after 5500 years." Cited in: Hales (1830, 278). For additional citations of Ephraem's claims, see: Assemani (1719), Wacholder (1974, 99), and Anstey (1913, 46). Ephraem was one of many ancient authors who claimed that the rabbis deliberately reduced the primeval chronology for messianic reasons.

⁴ Each of these ancient authors (save Jerome) argued that the Jewish rabbis in the second century AD deflated the primeval chronology by ca. 1300 years in their Hebrew manuscripts to discredit Jesus as the Messiah. Chronological speculations and calculations about the time of the messiah's arrival (messianic chronology) were widespread in Second Temple Judaism. Messianic chronologies were usually associated with the Days of Creation, with each day representing 1000 years of history. In some schemes, the messiah would arrive in the 6th millennium (5000–5999AM), and usher in the kingdom in the 7th millennium (6000AM) (Beckwith 1996). Many Jews believed the Messiah would arrive in/around the year 4000AM (Silver 1927, 6, 16). See also the rabbinic Babylonian Talmud: *Abodah Zarah* 9a, *Sanhedrin* 97b. Reducing the primeval chronology as presently found in the MT places Jesus' life outside the time of the coming of the Messiah. The rabbinic world chronology in *The Seder Olam Rabbah* (ca. AD 150), which is derived from the MT, places Creation at 3761 BC, and the arrival of the Messiah about AD240, eliminating Jesus from messianic consideration. *The Seder Olam* significantly deflates post-Exilic chronology as well, and reinterprets Daniel 9 to associate it with the destruction of the Temple instead of Jesus Christ. It was written by the very same rabbi who, we argue, deflated the proto-MT's numbers, and who had complete control over the Hebrew manuscripts that survived the destruction of the Temple. This ancient and historically-grounded claim has been recently reintroduced to conservative OT scholarship by Sexton (2015, 210–218) who documents numerous post-Reformation Christian scholars who also made this argument, favoring the priority of the LXX in Genesis 5 and 11. See also: Sexton and Smith Jr. (2016). The arguments from this article favoring the LXX's primeval chronology were recently surveyed in Thomas (2017, 125). Eusebius does not attribute the motive to messianic chronology and discrediting Jesus, rather, their purpose was to encourage their contemporaries to lower their age of marrying. This motivation is inadequate and is not supported by any historical evidence (*Chronicle* 25:10). However, Eusebius' explanation confirms the widespread belief that the rabbis altered the text.

Table 1. Comparison of the numerical divergences in Genesis 5 and 11 in the Masoretic (MT), Septuagint (LXX), and Samaritan Pentateuch (SP). Footnotes provide further explanations for some of the numbers given.

Patriarch	References	Masoretic (MT)			Septuagint (LXX)			Samaritan Pentateuch (SP)		
		Begetting Age	Remaining Years	Lifespan	Begetting Age	Remaining Years	Lifespan	Begetting Age	Remaining Years	Lifespan
Adam	Gen 5:3–5	130	800	930	230	700	930	130	800	930
Seth	Gen 5:6–8	105	807	912	205	707	912	105	807	912
Enosh	Gen 5:9–11	90	815	905	190	715	905	90	815	905
Kenan	Gen 5:12–14	70	840	910	170	740	910	70	840	910
Mahalalel	Gen 5:15–17	65	830	895	165	730	895	65	830	895
Jared	Gen 5:18–20	162	800	962	162	800	962	62 ⁵	785 ⁵	847 ⁵
Enoch	Gen 5:21–23	65	300	365	165	200	365	65	300	365
Methuselah	Gen 5:25–27	187	782	969	187	782	969	67 ⁵	653 ⁵	720 ⁵
Lamech	Gen 5:28–31	182 ⁶	595	777 ⁷	188 ⁶	565	753 ⁷	53 ⁵	600 ⁵	653 ⁵
Noah	Gen 5:32; 7:11; 8:13-14; 9:28-29; 10:21; 11:10	500/ (502)	After the Flood 350	950	500/ (502)	After the Flood 350	950	500/ (502)	After the Flood 350	950
Shem	Gen 11:10–11	100	500		100	500		100	500	600 ⁸
Arpachshad	Gen 11:12–13	35	403/430		135	430/330 ⁹		135	303 ⁸	438
Cainan	Gen 11:13b–14b				130	330 ¹				
Shelah	Gen 11:14–15	30	403		130	330/403 ¹⁰		130	303	433
Eber	Gen 11:16–17	34	430/ 370 ¹¹		134	370		134	270	404
Peleg	Gen 11:18–19	30	209		130	209		130	109	239
Reu	Gen 11:20–21	32	207		132	207		132	107	239
Serug	Gen 11:22–23	30	200		130	200		130	100	230
Nahor	Gen 11:24–25	29	119 ¹²		79	129 ¹²		79	69	148
Terah	Gen 11:26,32; Acts 7:2–4	70/ (130)	(75)	205	70/ (130)	(75)	205	70	(75)	145 ¹³
Abraham	Gen 11:26,32; 12:1–4; 21:5; 25:7	100	(75)	175	100	(75)	175	100	(75)	175

⁵ The begetting ages (62, 67, 53), remaining years (785, 653, 600) and lifespans (847, 720, 653) for Jared, Methuselah and Lamech in the Samaritan Pentateuch are derived from the *Book of Jubilees* (ca. 160 BC origin). The entire antediluvian chronology of the SP mirrors the chronology found in *Jubilees*. *Jubilees* imposes an artificial chronological framework onto the biblical text in order to create a schematic history spanning 50 cycles of jubilees (49 years each), a total of 2450 years from Adam to Joshua's entry into Canaan (*Jub.* 50:4; VanderKam, 2002, 523–544). To achieve this goal, the primeval chronology was severely deflated by the author. The artificial, chronological structure in *Jubilees* is evidence that its begetting ages have been deliberately reduced throughout Genesis 5 (and 11). The jubilean scheme also forced the author to alter the remaining years and lifespans of Jared, Methuselah, and Lamech to prevent them from living past the Flood. There is no discernable reason for the SP to have been altered exactly in this same manner, except to bring it in line with the antediluvian chronology of *Jubilees*. Jerome's SP manuscripts with the higher begetting ages, remaining years and lifespans for Methuselah and the 182-year begetting age for Lamech provide strong evidence that the now extant SP was deliberately reduced to reflect the Genesis 5 chronology of *Jubilees* (see p. 175). Because of the obvious artificiality of *Jubilees*, the begetting ages in the SP/MT that match it should be deemed inaccurate (unless any particular *ba* can be corroborated elsewhere, such as Terah's 70). In other words, the begetting ages in *Jubilees* Genesis 5 and 11 are not derived from a Hebrew biblical text, but are the result of an artificial scheme.

⁶ This six-year discrepancy between the MT (182) and LXX (188) is historically and textually complex. Lamech's numbers in the LXX (188, 565, 753) most likely arose in the original translation from a scribal error while the translator was reading the Hebrew *Vorlage*, followed by a complex, two-stage and deliberate scribal emendation to correct the chronological matrix.

⁷ The manuscripts of Josephus for Lamech's begetting age are equally divided between 188 and 182/82 (Niese 2008, 20; Whiston 2009, 851). The MT preserves the three original numbers for Lamech (182, 595, 777), with *LAB* providing strong support for their originality (182, 595). I propose that Josephus' begetting age for Lamech was originally 182 (see table 2 and fn. 23). The number 707 for Lamech's lifespan appears in all MSS of Josephus, the result of the tens digit (70) dropping out of its Greek text in the early stages of its transmissional history. It was almost certainly 777 originally, matching the MT. No manuscripts of Josephus match the LXX's lifespan of 753 for Lamech, and 707/777 cannot be reconstructed back to 753 in Greek via scribal error. If correct, this is further evidence that Josephus was using a Hebrew text of Genesis for the primeval chronology, and not the LXX.

Jerome (AD 340–420), Julian of Toledo (AD 642–690), Jacob of Edessa (AD 640–708), Byzantine chronologist George Syncellus (d. AD 810), and Armenian annalist Bar Hebraeus (AD 1226–1286),¹⁴ just to name a few.⁴

Most ancient Christian scholars argued for the originality of the LXX's primeval chronology. This strong consensus lasted for over 14 centuries until the Reformation, when the MT supplanted the primacy of the LXX in the western church. Thus, a chronological interpretation of Genesis 5 and 11 using the MT's numbers became the majority viewpoint. William H. Green of Princeton challenged the chronological interpretation with his seminal article "Primeval Chronology" (Green 1890). Green's non-chronological interpretation of Genesis 5 and 11 eventually ascended to a position of primacy in conservative OT scholarship. (For an excellent refutation of Green, see Sexton 2015). Since Genesis 5 and 11 were deemed to be useless for chronological computation, the numerical divergences in the MT, LXX, and SP were relegated to irrelevance by most evangelicals. Only a handful of critical scholars have shown any genuine interest in examining the numbers in-depth and have attempted to reconstruct the original text. Presuppositions dominated by a critical view of Scripture unduly influence most of these reconstruction attempts, leading to a variety of untenable conclusions (Etz 1993; Hendel 1998; Larsson 1983; Northcote 2007; Tov 2015). These works provide helpful insights at the micro-level, but their macro-perspective is alien to a high view of Scripture. The minority of conservatives who have held to the chronological interpretation have largely defaulted to the MT's

numbers. Most conservative treatments of the subject are superficial in their scope and analysis, with exceedingly few serious attempts at historical and text-critical investigation and reconstruction. Notable exceptions include Shaw (2004), Young (2003), and Cosner and Carter (2015).

A full-fledged investigation into the numerical divergences in the three textual witnesses requires extensive research, far beyond the scope of a journal article. This is one of the major challenges with this subject.¹⁵ Thus, this article focuses primarily on the age of Methuselah in Genesis 5:25 at the birth of Lamech—what we call his "begetting age." It will also survey weighty evidence that favors the originality of most of the LXX's numbers. These two foci are inexplicably intertwined with one another.

Numerous scholars have treated the reading of 167 years for Methuselah's begetting age as an insurmountable problem for any argument in favor of the LXX's overall primeval chronology. They claim that the 167 reading is original, and then assume that its mere existence serves to discredit the Septuagint's entire primeval chronology. Sarfati's statement is fairly representative of this position: "The Septuagint chronologies are demonstrably inflated,¹⁶ as they contain the (obvious) error that Methuselah lived 17 [sic 14] years after the Flood" (Sarfati 2003, 14).¹⁷ Numerous other scholars have made similar claims (Beechick 2001, 68; Cosner and Carter 2015, 99, 102; Hodge 2015, n. 3; Jones 2002, 13; Sarfati 2015, 460–462; Steinmann 2017, 155; Williams 1998, 105, n. 20). Insurmountable problems with this perspective emerge when the historical and textual evidence are much more closely examined.

⁴ I propose that when the rabbis deflated the chronology of Genesis 11 in the proto-MT, they left the remaining years intact. It was not necessary to inflate them, since the original text contained no lifespans to serve as a cross check (unlike Genesis 5). Thus, the MT retains all the original remaining years figures except for scribal errors (Eber, and possibly Arpachshad and Nahor). Further, the lifespan figures in Genesis 11 SP from Shem to Nahor are secondary harmonizations and were not part of the original, inspired text. They cannot serve as a basis for textual reconstruction in Genesis 11, contra Cosner and Carter (2015, 103–104) and Shaw (2004, 68). Additionally, the remaining year figures from Arpachshad to Nahor in Genesis 11 SP have no external attestation until Eusebius' tabulation of them, nor are they found in the LXX or MT. They are all secondary readings as well. Since the remaining year figures in Genesis 11 SP are incorrect, the lifespans in Genesis 11 SP are also incorrect (except Shem's). Similarly, the MT's begetting ages in Genesis 11 have no external attestation before the *Seder Olam Rabbah*, which was written by the very same rabbis who, we argue, deflated the chronology of the proto-MT. In summary, the triple witness of the matching begetting ages in the LXX/SP/Josephus and the double witness of the matching remaining years of the LXX/MT (after scribal errors are accounted for) serve as the strongest entry points for reconstructing the numbers in Genesis 11:10–32.

⁹ Most LXX manuscripts read 430 or 330 for Arpachshad's remaining years (*ry*). An early scribal error may explain a change from an original 403 (MT) in Hebrew to 430 or 330 in the LXX (Hendel 1998, 73). The proto-MT also could have easily lost the suffix ם at the end of "30" in its transmissional history, thereby accidentally changing the number in the Hebrew from 430 to 403. The second scenario is much simpler, as the LXX translators most likely had a Hebrew *Vorlage* with the 430 figure. Thus, I favor 430 as the original reading for Arpachshad's remaining years. 330 comes from a simple scribal gloss from 430 in Greek (Shaw 2004, 68).

¹⁰ Several reconstructions to one original *ry* for Shelah are plausible for the MT/LXX. A few LXX MSS read 403 (including the one used by Eusebius, *Chronicle* 27:2), matching the MT. 330 is found in the majority of LXX MSS (Ray 1985, 32). An accidental subtraction of ם from 430 in the Hebrew could easily account for the MT's present reading (Shaw 2004, 68). For now, I favor 403 as original, but 430, 330, or 303 (Sexton 2015, 217, n. 137) are also possible. If 403 is original, 330 may have been accidentally picked up by an early scribe from Kainan's *ry*, or is the result of a two-stage scribal error. Any of these resolutions to Shelah's *ry* do not undermine our overall theory.

¹¹ 430 is a scribal error for Eber in the MT and was originally 370, preserved in some LXX MSS. See Cosner and Carter (2015, 103–104) and Hendel (1998, 73).

¹² The remaining years for Nahor in the MT (119) or LXX (129) could be explained in either direction as a minor scribal error. Either option is plausible, though I slightly favor 129.

¹³ A SP scribe amended the lifespan for Terah to 145 in an attempt to "fix" the chronological matrix involving Abraham's birth and the end of Terah's life. The reading is (almost) universally considered to be secondary (Hendel 1998, 74).

¹⁴ Hayward (1995, 35–36); Stancati (2010, 123–124); Romeny (2008, 154); Synkellos (2002, 125). Bar Hebraeus is partially translated from Latin to English in Hales (1830, 279) and Seyffarth (1859, 144). Bar Hebraeus is also known as Abulpharaj.

Ancient External Witnesses and the LXX Manuscript Evidence

Demetrius the chronographer (ca. 220 BC)

Demetrius was a Hellenistic Jewish historian who wrote in Alexandria during the reign of Ptolemy IV (221–205 BC). He is “the earliest datable Alexandrian-Jewish author we know” (Finegan 1998, 141). Demetrius’ works are preserved in Eusebius’ *Praeparatio Evangelica* and Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromata*. He wrote in Greek (Hanson 1983, 183, n. 6) and is the earliest known witness to the Septuagint. In Demetrius’ chronological system, Creation is dated at 5307 BC and the Flood at 3043 BC (Finegan 1998, 145).

In Fragment 2:18, Demetrius writes, “[F]rom Adam until Joseph’s brothers came into Egypt, there were 3624 years; and from the Deluge until Jacob’s coming into Egypt, 1360 years” (Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 9.21.18).¹⁸ These figures yield a period of 2264 years from Adam to the Flood (3624–1360). Demetrius is obviously using the LXX’s longer chronology. For his antediluvian chronology to add up to 2264/2 years,¹⁹ the begetting age for Methuselah must be 187. Thus, Demetrius is the earliest known witness to an LXX manuscript that contained the 187 reading for Genesis 5:25, remarkably close in time to the original Greek translation of the Pentateuch (ca. 281 BC).

Pseudo-Philo’s *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (LAB, First Century AD)

LAB is also known as the *Book of Biblical Antiquities*, a work presently extant in Latin, translated from an intermediate Greek text (Harrington 1970, 507), and originating from a Hebrew based biblical text. When modern scholars originally discovered *LAB*, it was incorrectly attributed to Philo of Alexandria. The author is now called Pseudo-Philo. *LAB* provides a chronicle of biblical history from Adam to Saul. It includes a mixture of biblical materials as well as parallels from non-canonical Jewish traditions.

Scholars who have extensively studied *LAB* unanimously agree that it was derived from a Hebrew text. *LAB* was originally written in Hebrew by an author with a strong Pharisaic background who lived in Israel proper (Harrington 1970, 508–514; Jacobson 1996, 210; Feldman 1996, 58; Ferch 1977, 135–151; James 1917, 28)²⁰ during the first century AD, most likely before the destruction of the Second Temple, and possibly as early as the time of Christ (Harrington 1983, 299; Ferch 1977, 137; James 1917, 7). *LAB* 1:2–22 includes begetting ages and remaining years for the antediluvian patriarchs from Seth to Lamech. Its figures match the LXX’s numbers in Genesis 5 (save Lamech’s), including Methuselah’s (187, 782). No lifespans are recorded, apart from Noah’s (950). *LAB* also records Adam’s remaining years as 700, implying his age was 230 when he fathered Seth. Most external witnesses to

¹⁸ Under the auspices of the Genesis 5 and 11 Research Project sponsored by the Associates for Biblical Research, plans are in place to publish a book investigating the text critical, exegetical, and historical issues bearing on the numerical divergences in Genesis 5 and 11: Henry B. Smith Jr., *From Adam to Abraham: The Case for the Septuagint’s Chronology in Genesis 5 and 11*, forthcoming.

¹⁹ The statement, “demonstrably inflated,” refers the oft-repeated claim that the Alexandrian Jews deliberately inflated the begetting ages in LXX Genesis 5 and 11 (and reduced the remaining years of life in Genesis 5) to bring the primeval chronology in line with Manetho’s Egyptian history. There are insurmountable problems with this theory: (1) It cannot explain the matching begetting ages in the SP and LXX of Genesis 11, which would need to arise separately and independently, and yet somehow identically, if the inflation theory were true. (2) There is no ancient historical evidence to support the LXX chronological inflation theory, which appears to be a 19th century AD innovation. (3) It would have been impossible for the LXX translators to get away with such a fraud due to the public nature of the project and the widespread geographic dissemination of the LXX in antiquity. (4) There is no evidence of any desire whatsoever in the LXX of Genesis to conform to Egyptian worldview claims. It is inexplicable that the translators would therefore have altered the sacred text to conform solely with Egyptian chronology, risking the wrath of God by doing so (Deuteronomy 4:2). (5) There is incontrovertible evidence that Josephus and Pseudo-Philo’s *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (both first century AD) used biblical Hebrew texts of Genesis 5 and 11 that contained the longer chronology. (6) The chronology of the LXX does not even achieve this alleged goal. Paul J. Ray writes, “The suggestion that the LXX chronology resulted as a response to the Egyptian chronology of Manetho is inadequate. The modern scheme is dated to about 3000 B.C. However, Manetho’s actual figures total 5471 years by dead reckoning, from the First Dynasty to the conquering of Egypt by Alexander the Great, a figure which was assumed as fairly accurate until recently.” (1985, 10, n. 7). (7) Numerous Septuagint and text critical scholars maintain that the 100-year differences between the numbers in the LXX of Genesis 5 and 11 and the MT/SP should be attributed to the LXX’s Hebrew Vorlage, not the translators (Hendel, 1998, 78–80), (Tov, 2015, 221, n. 1), and (Wevers, 1993, 73). For more scholars, see Sexton (2015, 213). For further discussion of the LXX inflation hypothesis, see Sexton and Smith Jr. (2016, 45–48). The Sexton/Smith Jr. article also argues that evangelicals should jettison the LXX inflation argument in favor of a different model that far better explains the textual and historical evidence: deliberate chronological deflation in the proto-Masoretic Hebrew text by the rabbis in the second century AD for the purposes of discrediting Jesus as the Christ.

¹⁷ On page 15, table 1 presents Methuselah’s original begetting age in the LXX as 167.

¹⁸ Eusebius had excerpted Alexander Polyhistor, who in turn had excerpted Demetrius.

¹⁹ The primary, extant texts of the LXX yield 2262 years from Adam to the Flood instead of 2264 as cited by Demetrius. C. Hayes’ explanation for a scribal error in Demetrius, where 1360 was originally 1362, is the likeliest reason for the two-year difference (1741, 71). See also: Adler (2010, 501, n. 32).

²⁰ An extensive list of additional scholars who subscribe to a first-century AD Hebrew textual origin for *LAB* can be found in Charlesworth (1981, 170).

Genesis 5 do not mention the remaining years of life, but *LAB* does. All its remaining-year figures also match the LXX (table 2).

LAB contains a few accidental scribal errors, but they are rather easily reconstructed and are compatible with the LXX alone, and not the MT/SP of Genesis 5.²¹ *LAB* not only confirms the correct figures for Methuselah (187, 782), but it also provides an independent, first-century AD witness of Hebrew, Pharisaic provenance that attests to the longer antediluvian chronology found in the Septuagint. Since *LAB* was written in Israel at least three centuries after the Pentateuch was translated into Greek in Egypt, it is completely independent of the LXX translation enterprise. Further, manuscripts of the LXX record 188 as the begetting age for Lamech in Genesis 5:28.⁶ The begetting age of 182 and remaining years of 595 for Lamech in *LAB* match

the MT, undoubtedly supporting *LAB*'s Hebrew textual origin.²¹ *LAB* offers definitive proof of Hebrew texts circulating in Israel that contained the higher begetting ages and lower remaining years also found independently in the Greek LXX, including Methuselah's correct figures.

Josephus (ca. AD 90)

Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* corroborates the evidence adduced from *LAB*.²² The higher begetting ages in the LXX of Genesis 5 and 11 appear in *Ant.* 1.83–87, 149–50 (table 2).²³ Moreover, in accordance with the longer chronology found in the LXX, Josephus states that the history recorded in the Hebrew Bible covers 5000 years: "Those antiquities contain the history of 5,000 years; and are taken out of our sacred books, but translated by me into the Greek tongue" (*Against Apion* 1.1; emphasis added).

Table 2. The LXX and first century AD Hebrew text-based witnesses to Genesis 5. Numbers in brackets are not stated in the text, but are calculations based on other explicitly stated figures. Footnotes provide further explanations for some of the numbers given.

Patriarch	References	Septuagint (LXX)			Josephus			<i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i>		
		Begetting age	Remaining years	Lifespan	Begetting age	Remaining years	Lifespan	Begetting age	Remaining years	Lifespan
Adam	Gen 5:3–5	230	700	930	230	700	930	—	700	—
Seth	Gen 5:6–8	205	707	912	205	(707)	912	205 ²¹	707	(912)
Enosh	Gen 5:9–11	190	715	905	190	(715)	905	190 ²¹	715	(905)
Kenan	Gen 5:12–14	170	740	910	170	(740)	910	170 ²¹	740 ²¹	(910)
Mahalalel	Gen 5:15–17	165	730	895	165	(730)	895	165	730	(895)
Jared	Gen 5:18–20	162	800	962	162	(800)	962	162 ²¹	800	(962)
Enoch	Gen 5:21–23	165	200	365	165	(200)	365	165	200	(365)
Methuselah	Gen 5:25–27	187	782	969	187	(782)	969	187	782	(969)
Lamech	Gen 5:28–31	188 ⁶	565	753 ⁷	182/188 ²³	(595)	707/777 ⁷	182	595 ²¹	(777)
Noah	Gen 5:32; 7:11; 8:13–14; 9:28–29; 11:10	500/ (502)	After the Flood 350	950	—	—	950	500 ²¹	After the Flood 350	950

²¹ No textual reconstruction can make *LAB* compatible with the MT's/SP's begetting ages (*ba*) or remaining years (*ry*) in Genesis 5 (except for Jared, Methuselah and Lamech in the MT). (1) Seth's *ba* is 105, and is explained by a scribal error: Latin CCV (205) to CV (105). An original reading of 205 (CCV) is affirmed by Seth's *ry*, which *LAB* records as 707. Seth's lifespan (707+205) would then equal 912 years (unstated in *LAB*), the lifespan figure extant in the MT, LXX and SP. (2) Enosh's *ba* was slightly corrupted from 190 to 180 in the Latin text. His *ry* of 715 matches the LXX. (3) Kenan's *ry* was slightly corrupted from 740 to 730. His *ba* reads 520 in Latin (DXX), an obvious scribal error from CLXX (170). (4) Jared's *ba* was slightly corrupted from 162 (CLXII) to 172 (CLXXII). (5) Lamech's *ry* was slightly corrupted from 595 to 585. (6) Noah's begetting age in *LAB* for Genesis 5:32 is 300, obviously a scribal error. All other witnesses read 500. For these textual reconstructions, see: Hughes (1990, 251), Jacobson (1996, 286–288), and Harrington (1983, 304–307).

²² Feldman has extensively documented how *LAB* and Josephus are closely related at the level of the Hebrew text (1996, 57–82).

²³ A text-critical reconstruction of Josephus' statements on Genesis 5 and 11 (table 2) based on the extant manuscripts is found in Thackeray (1931, 30–33, 38, n. d., 39–41, 72, n. h., 73–75). For most of the raw data from the extant manuscripts of Josephus, see Niese, Noe, and Marshall (2008). I propose that only minor refinements to Thackeray's work are required, and an expanded examination shows that the original text of Josephus vindicates the originality of the LXX's primeval chronology.

Further, he states: “The things narrated in the sacred Scriptures are, however, innumerable, seeing that they embrace the history of 5000 years” (*Ant.* 1.13). This is highly significant historical evidence, since Josephus explicitly states that he worked from Hebrew biblical texts (*Ant.* 1:5; 9.208, 10.218; *Ag. Ap.* 1.54). Josephus’ statements concerning his use of Hebrew manuscript(s) are widely affirmed by modern scholars, confirming that Josephus used a Genesis Hebrew text when he wrote *Antiquities* (Attridge 1976, 29–33; Feldman 1998, 30, 63–64; Gera 2011, 125; Norton 2011, 69–71). For example, Thackeray argues extensively that Josephus used a “Semitic” text (Hebrew, and possibly Aramaic) for Genesis through Ruth (1967, 75–99). After a careful and extensive analysis of more than 100 Josephus passages that deal with the Pentateuch, Nodet concludes that “Josephus’ ultimate Hebrew source (H) is quite close to the Hebrew *Vorlage* of G [LXX],” and probably came from the Temple library (1997, 174, 192–194).²⁴

For Methuselah’s begetting age, no MSS of Josephus contain the erroneous 167 reading. Manuscripts of Josephus attest to the 187 reading (*Ant.* 1.86), as affirmed by Niese, Noe, and Marshall (2008, 20), Thackeray (1931, 40), and Whiston (2009, 851). There is no doubt that 187 is the correct number in Josephus, and this figure, along with the other higher begetting ages in Genesis 5 and 11, were originally derived from the Hebrew text of Genesis.^{7,23}

The combined Hebrew textual witness of *Antiquities* and *LAB* provides irrefutable evidence against the claim that the Alexandrian scribes inflated the primeval chronology of the LXX to bring it in line with Egyptian chronology. Instead, the higher numbers already existed in the Hebrew text of Genesis at the time of the Septuagint’s translation, and were also later present in Hebrew manuscripts used by Pseudo-Philo and Josephus in Israel during the first century AD.

Julius Africanus (ca. AD 221/222)

Julius Africanus (AD 170–240) wrote his *Chronographiae* while living in Israel, and was an advocate of the LXX chronology. Fragment 16a details the Septuagint’s antediluvian begetting ages, listing Methuselah’s as 187 years old. In 16b, Africanus

provides a pre-Flood summation of 2262 years, which places Methuselah’s death six years before the Flood, consistent with the 187 figure (Wallraff, Roberto, and Pinggera 2007, 27–29, 35).²⁵

Eusebius (ca. AD 260–340)

Eusebius is an early witness to the 187/167 discrepancy between LXX manuscripts. In his *Chronicle*, he writes,

Methuselah fathered Lamech when he was 167 years of age. He lived an additional 802 years. Thus he would have survived the flood by 22 [14] years. However, in other versions he died before the flood having lived an additional 782 years [after Lamech’s birth] (*Chronicle* 24:8).²⁶

Eusebius’ record places multiple extant manuscripts of the LXX with the 187/782 figures in the early fourth century AD. The manuscript evidence now available to modern biblical scholarship fully supports his statements. Codices Alexandrinus (A), Cottonianus (D), and Coislinianus (M), and over a dozen miniscules contain Methuselah’s correct begetting age of 187 (Ray 1985, 28, 31; Wevers 1974a, 106). Several prominent scholars have agreed that 187 is the Septuagint’s original reading for Methuselah. Swete, though he was primarily using Codex Vaticanus for his work,²⁷ notes that the correction from 167 to 187 made in Codex A may have been written in the margin by the original scribe (and not later), and he accepts 187 as the original reading in the LXX proper (1930, 8). Brooke and McLean surmise that 167 was corrected in Codex A by the first successive scribe, but they note their uncertainty with a question mark (1906, 12). Brenton, who documents few variants, accepts 167 as original, but has “Alex. 187 years” in the footnotes (1879, 6). More recently, OT scholar Eugene H. Merrill also argued for the originality of the 187 reading (2002, 115). Papyri 911 (late third century AD) and 961 (fourth century AD) both contain the original reading of 187 for Methuselah (Wevers 1974b, 13, 15). These papyri, Eusebius’ statement, and Africanus’ chronology occur prior to the correction found in Codex A (fifth century AD), indicating that its 187 reading was not just an ad hoc modification based on the obvious chronological problem with Methuselah’s death, but was supported by other existing (and earlier) LXX manuscripts that had retained the 187 figure.

²⁴ Nodet also argues that Josephus did not use the LXX until “the last stages of his work,” (1997, 155).

²⁵ Fragment 15 reads: “...and from their remaining Hebrew histories, they [the Jews] have handed down a period of 5500 years up to the advent of the Word of salvation [Christ]...” (Wallraff, Roberto, and Pinggera 2007, 25). Africanus resided in Israel most of his life, and had knowledge of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. He even refers to Hebrew as “our” way of speaking (Wallraff, Roberto, and Pinggera 2007, xv–xvi). Thus, Africanus would have been able to compare manuscripts of the LXX to those available to him in Hebrew. It is interesting that Africanus never mentions the numerical divergences between the (proto) MT and LXX in Genesis 5 and 11. Perhaps this is evidence that his particular Hebrew texts contained the higher begetting ages.

²⁶ <http://www.attalus.org/armenian/euseb7.htm>. The number “22” for years after the Flood should be “14,” and is most likely a scribal error.

²⁷ Vaticanus is missing Genesis 1:1–46:28.

Jerome (ca. AD 340–420)

By Jerome's day in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the church at large was aware of the numerical differences between the Hebrew and Greek texts of Genesis 5 and 11. Specifically, Methuselah's begetting age was "a celebrated question, and one which has been publicly aired in argument by all the churches" (Hayward 1995, 35). Living in Israel and closely interacting with the Jewish rabbis of his day, Jerome had before him a manuscript of the LXX that contained the 167 figure. Concerning this, he writes:

Therefore, as in many other instances so also in this, it remains that there is a mistake in the number. However, both in the Hebrew books, and in those of the Samaritans, I have found it written thus: *And Methuselah lived for 187 years and begat Lamech. And after he had begotten Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years...* and all the days of Methuselah were 969 years, and he died. And Lamech lived for 182 years and begat Noah (Hayward 1995, 36).

In Jerome's copies (plural) of the Samaritan Pentateuch, the figures for Methuselah and Lamech in Genesis 5:25–28 do not match the numbers in any of the SP manuscripts that have survived up until today (table 1). Instead, Jerome testifies that his copies of the SP contained for Methuselah the higher begetting age of 187, the remaining years of 782, and the lifespan of 969, matching the MT, numerous extant LXX manuscripts, Demetrius (LXX), Josephus (Hebrew), *LAB* (Hebrew) and Africanus (LXX). This powerful evidence from Jerome not only confirms the accuracy of the 187 reading for Methuselah, but it also indicates that *our present day manuscripts of the Samaritan Pentateuch have been deliberately reduced for the lives of both Methuselah and Lamech* (at minimum). Any attempt to reconstruct the textual history of the primeval history must take into account Jerome's historically weighty testimony as it relates to the Samaritan Pentateuch of Genesis 5.⁵

Augustine (ca. AD 350)

Augustine provides an eyewitness record of five additional ancient manuscripts (three of which were the LXX) that contained a begetting age of 187 for Methuselah: "For there are three Greek mss., one

Latin, and one Syriac, which agree with one another, and in all of these Methuselah is said to have died six years before the deluge." (*City of God* XV:13 in Schaff 1886, 675).²⁸ He later states that the pre-Flood period lasted 2262 years (*City of God* XV:20). Clearly aware of the 167/187 discrepancy, Augustine provides the most logical and plausible explanation for the reading of 167:

One must therefore more plausibly maintain, that when first their labors began to be transcribed from the copy in Ptolemy's library, some such misstatement might find its way into the first copy made, and from it might be disseminated far and wide; and that this might arise from no fraud, but from a mere copyist's error. This is a sufficiently plausible account of the difficulty regarding Methuselah's life (*City of God* XV:13).²⁹

Textual Reconstruction

With all of the evidence outlined above, we can firmly claim that the 167 reading for Methuselah's begetting age in some LXX MSS of Genesis 5:25 is an early scribal error, and was not part of the original LXX translation.³⁰

Upon examination of the Greek text surrounding Genesis 5:25, it becomes quite understandable to see how the error occurred. On two occasions, the number 60 appears in the immediate context regarding Enoch (Genesis 5:21 and 23). The most logical explanation is that the "6" in "60" (ἑξήκοντα—*hexēkonta*) was picked up from 5:21 and accidentally replaced the "8" in "80" (ὀγδοήκοντα—*ogdoēkonta*).³¹ This would have been an especially easy mistake to make, since the words and their order in 5:21 and 25 are almost identical, except for the words and letters here in bold. (My English translation is rigidly wooden).

Genesis 5:21 "And Enoch lived 100 and 60, 5 years, and he fathered Methuselah..."

καὶ ἔζησεν **Ἐνωχ** ἑκατὸν καὶ ἑξήκοντα πέντε ἔτη καὶ ἐγέννησεν τὸν **Μαθουσαλα**

Genesis 5:25 "And Methuselah lived 100 and 80, 7 years, and he fathered Lamech..."

καὶ ἔζησεν **Μαθουσαλα** ἑκατὸν καὶ ὀγδοήκοντα ἑπτὰ ἔτη καὶ ἐγέννησεν τὸν **Λαμεχ**

As the scribe was writing, "lived 100 and...years,

²⁸ Also, see: *City of God* XV:11. Methuselah's death "six years before the deluge" in the LXX chronology depends on a begetting age of 188 for Lamech. If one argues that the original text should be the MT's figure of 182, then Methuselah would die in the year of the Flood, akin to the MT's Genesis 5 chronology.

²⁹ Augustine incorrectly believed in the inspiration of the LXX translation, so he did not attribute the mistake to the translators. His theory that an early scribal error was the cause of the 167 reading, however, is not materially affected by his belief about the nature of the original LXX translation, and is still valid.

³⁰ Young (2003, 422) argues that the begetting age of 67 for Methuselah in Genesis 5 SP is somehow derived from the erroneous reading of 167 in the LXX. The only viable explanation for the 167 reading in the LXX is a scribal error, which fits the other textual and external evidence extremely well. To argue it arose in relationship to the SP requires a series of complicated and implausible steps for which there is no evidence. Such a textual reconstruction is untenable. An argument similar to Young's is briefly made in Cosner and Carter (2015, 100) and Hendel (1998, 66).

³¹ The reader should bear in mind that the Greek text from which the scribe was working was in all capital letters (uncials), and that the words ran very closely together, increasing the possibility of scribal error. This is particularly the case in Genesis 5 and 11, whose textual matrices are replete with numbers, and many of the verses are quite repetitive.

and he fathered...” he accidentally replaced ὄγδο (ogdo, 8) with ἕξ (hex, 6) on the front of ἤκοντα (ēkonta) by a simple slip of the eye—a phenomenon termed *homoioleuton*. The scribe who committed this error would not have changed the remaining years (782), since he obviously reduced the begetting age to 167 by accident and did not realize it. However, when the next scribe who copied the manuscript came along, he noticed the discrepancy. Realizing that the sum of the begetting age and remaining years (782+167=949) would not equal Methuselah’s correct lifespan (969), the scribe changed the remaining years to 802 in order to “fix” the problem. It is likely that the lifespan figure of 969 was so well known and revered in Jewish thinking (Methuselah being the oldest person recorded in Scripture) that the scribe would not have altered it. This “correction” of the remaining years to 802, along with the already accidental and incorrect 167, and preservation of the revered 969 lifespan figure, entered the textual stream and was transmitted and copied over several centuries until it came down to Eusebius, Jerome, Augustine, et al. The historical and manuscript evidence show that the 187/782 readings were preserved in other LXX textual streams, and are both original and correct.

In any case, the number 167 is certainly not the result of deliberate reduction by the LXX translators. Even if the original Greek translation somehow did read 167, the only plausible explanation for this would be that the error was accidental. For by everyone’s account, the Greek translators were not motivated to reduce the chronology, and we have no reason to think that they deliberately put Methuselah’s death beyond the Flood. There is no discernible motive for the LXX translators to lower Methuselah’s begetting age intentionally from the original 187 to 167. Such a move would be inexplicable, especially since the Septuagint’s begetting ages are (almost) always higher than the MT/SP in Genesis 5. It turns out that Augustine’s centuries old solution to the problem was correct all along.

Conclusions

The simplest and most plausible explanation for the erroneous 167 reading in some manuscripts of LXX Genesis 5:25 is that it was the accident of a scribe near the beginning of the Septuagint’s transmissional process. A basic text-critical reconstruction affirms this claim. Our earliest witness to LXX Genesis 5:25 is the chronology of Demetrius (who lived in Egypt less than 70 years after the original Greek translation), which

confirms 187 as the LXX’s original begetting age. Josephus (187, 969) and *LAB* (187, 782) also contain the correct numbers. All three of these external witnesses predate Theophilus of Antioch (d. AD 183), who is the first known source to record the 167 figure (*Ad Autolycus* 3:24; Grant, 1947, 191).³²

The 187/167 divergence has virtually no bearing on the ultimate question of the original primeval chronology. Text-critical divergences such as 187/167 must be evaluated on an individual basis. At no point does the variant become a legitimate argument against the possible precedence and superiority of the overall primeval chronology derived from the LXX. Using this scribal error to discredit the overall veracity of the LXX’s primeval chronology is superficial in its scope and methodologically unacceptable. Basic text-critical principles militate against drawing such a conclusion. The numbers in the three witnesses ought to be evaluated on their own merits, carefully taking into account both external and internal evidence. Septuagint scholar Peter Gentry explains:

Differences, therefore, between the LXX and other witnesses to the text which are genuine textual variants should be evaluated on a case by case basis, and one should not prefer *a priori* either the LXX or the MT (2009, 24).

Scholars predisposed towards the MT have overblown the significance of this variant, and have merely created a distraction from the complex text-critical issues surrounding the MT, LXX, and SP of Genesis 5 and 11, and the associated external historical evidence. As such, the argument that the LXX’s primeval chronology should be dismissed from serious consideration because of the 167 begetting age variant for Methuselah should be abandoned by biblical scholars and young-earth creationists, post haste.

While examining the date of Methuselah’s death in the LXX, we have necessarily introduced several issues closely connected to ascertaining the original figures given to Moses in Genesis 5 and 11. Since everyone agrees that the chronology in Genesis 5 and 11 was either inflated or deflated intentionally, someone in antiquity must necessarily be accused of altering many of the begetting ages by 100 years each (and by 50 in Nahor’s case). There are only two viable choices: either (1) the third-century BC Alexandrian Jews inflated the numbers during their translation of the Pentateuch into Greek, or (2) the second-century AD rabbinic Jews deflated the numbers in the few remaining Hebrew manuscripts that survived the

³² Theophilus also calculates 2242 years for the pre-Flood era. He does not discuss the begetting age for Methuselah at 187 years or the 2262-year discrepancy with either the MT or other LXX manuscripts. Hippolytus of Rome (AD 170–236) similarly records 2242 years for the antediluvian era, as does Eusebius (Finegan 1998, 159, 169). For a historical study of the Methuselah “problem” in church history, see O’Loughlin (1995, 182–225).

Roman devastations of ca. 70 and 135AD. There is no textual or external historical evidence from antiquity to support the LXX inflation hypothesis.¹⁶ However, evidence abounds that the rabbis in Israel (living in an age filled with chrono-messianic speculation) deflated the proto-MT's primeval chronology in the second century AD to discredit Jesus' messianic claims. In the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple and the horrors of the Bar Kochba revolt 65 years later, it became possible for the rabbis to amend their Hebrew manuscripts and hide the trail of evidence. Judaism was no longer variegated, but dominated and controlled by one sect, the Pharisees. Their motive to discredit Jesus has profound New Testament theological support. The rabbis possessed adequate motive, authoritative means, and unique opportunity. No other group in history was in the position to change the biblical text in this way. The LXX translators certainly were not. Numerous ancient historians and several important Christian chronological works in the post-Reformation period consistently argued these points.^{4, 16} Actually, it appears that the LXX inflation hypothesis did not even exist until the nineteenth century AD. The LXX, LAB, and Josephus provide a triple textual witness to an exceptionally ancient Hebrew text with the higher begetting ages in Genesis 5, while the LXX, SP, and Josephus provide a triple textual witness to the same Hebrew text's higher begetting ages in Genesis 11. This evidence of the longer chronology from the first century AD and earlier affirms the claim that the begetting ages in the second century AD Hebrew manuscripts were deflated by at least 1250 years by the rabbis. Significantly, no unbiased external witness to the MT's complete primeval timeline exists before the time of Eusebius in the early fourth century AD.

In conclusion, young-earth creationists and biblical scholars would do well to abandon the LXX inflation hypothesis (along with superficial arguments in favor of the MT) and explore alternative models of textual reconstruction for Genesis 5 and 11 through further research and study.

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