

Genesis

Short & Long Chronology Overview



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The Chronologies in Genesis chapter five and eleven have some differences in the various textual witnesses. This is only a very brief overview and more detailed information is available on the website of *Associates for Biblical Research*. [Genesis 5 & 11 Research Project](#) This seems to be about the best and most comprehensive work on the subject.

Most modern Bibles have the "short" chronology, while the early church generally accepted the longer chronology. The short chronology is based on the Masoretic (MT) text which is generally the superior text. The longer chronology is mostly based on the Septuagint (LXX) which was translated from Hebrew into Greek in the 3rd century BC (~281 BC). Other early texts also illuminate the issue. It is obvious that "someone" has changed some of the numbers deliberately while some scribal errors are also present.

The Biblical text gives us some clues as to which is more likely.

When Abraham was about 99 years old, we have this text:

now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' (Gen. 18:11-13)

According to the MT text, when Abraham was 99 years old, Shem would have been 549 years old, Shelah 414 Years and Eber 384 Years. Since all of these people had siblings, we would reasonably expect that there were others that were still alive that also attained these longer ages.

When Abraham was 140 years old, we have this text:

Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in every way. (Gen. 24:1)

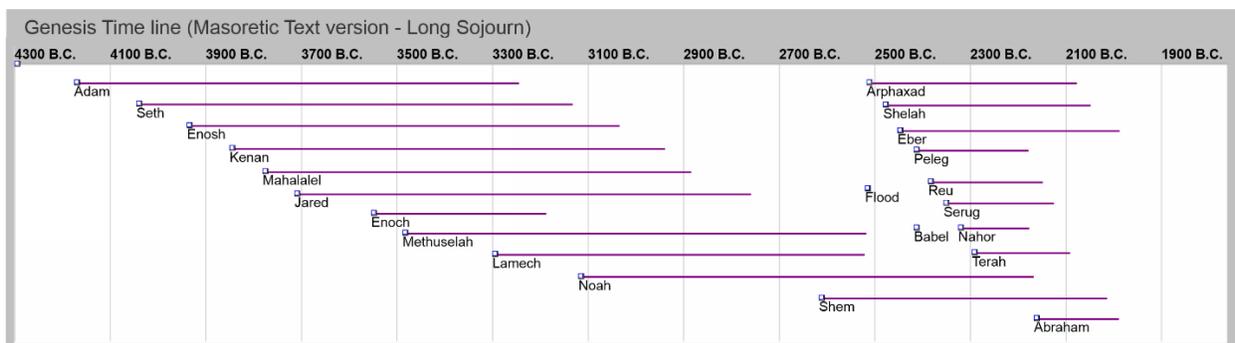
At Abraham's death we have this text:

Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life; and he was gathered to his people. (Gen. 25:8) He was 175 years old.

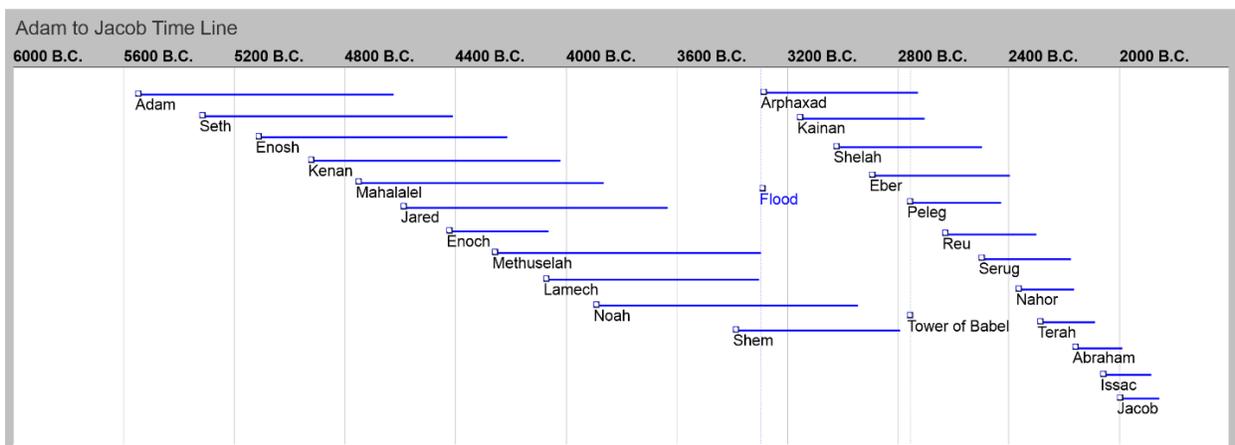
A visual representation comparing the length of the chronologies: (note they are based on what is called the "long sojourn" since Ex 12:40 records the time of Israel in Egypt as 430 Years and Gen 15:13 predicts an approximate 400 Years in Egypt. Dr. Douglas Petrovich has written a paper on this topic.

https://www.academia.edu/40790408/2019_Determining_the_Precise_Length_of_the_Israelite_Sojourn_in_Egypt)

This chart is based on the MT



This is the longer chronology



This chart represents ages in the shorter (MT) chronology

| Masoretic Text | Age at Abraham's Birth | Lifespans | Abraham's age at Patriarch's death |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------|
| Noah | Dead 2 Years | 950 | |
| Shem | 450 | 600 | 150 |
| Arphaxad | 350 | 438 | 88 |
| Shelah | 315 | 433 | 118 |
| Eber | 285 | 464 | Outlived Abraham by 4 Years |
| Peleg | Dead 12 Years | 239 | |
| Reu | 221 | 239 | 18 |
| Serug | 189 | 230 | 41 |
| Nahor | Dead 11 Years | 148 | |
| Terah | 130 | 205 | 75 |
| Abraham | 0 | 175 | |

This chart represents the longer chronology

| Long Chronology | Age at Abraham's Birth | Lifespans | Abraham's age at Patriarch's death |
|------------------------|------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------|
| Shem | Dead 630 Years | 600 | Not Born Yet |
| Arphaxad | Dead 565 Years | 565 | Not Born Yet |
| Kainan | Dead 535 Years | 460 | Not Born Yet |
| Shelah | Dead 332 Years | 533 | Not Born Yet |
| Eber | Dead 231 Years | 504 | Not Born Yet |
| Peleg | Dead 262 Years | 339 | Not Born Yet |
| Reu | Dead 132 Years | 339 | Not Born Yet |
| Serug | Dead 9 Years | 330 | Not Born Yet |
| Nahor | Dead 1 Year | 208 | Not Born Yet |
| Terah | 130 | 205 | 75 |
| Abraham | 0 | 175 | |

A couple of additional comments that are interesting and may help illuminate the issue slightly. In the MT text, Noah and Shem (the two people who went through the judgement of the flood lived past the tower of Babel over 200 Years. The MT chronology puts the tower of Babel event only about 100 years after the flood. While we know that people do fall away from God fairly quickly, this would seem rather odd with both Noah and Shem still being alive and the memory and evidence of the flood quite fresh that we would see this large-scale rebellion so soon. Consider a possible parallel. The Israelites under Moses wandered in the desert and then entered the promised land under Joshua. They saw all the miracles and the working of God in

their lives. Once the elders that outlived Joshua died, (Jos 24:31) we see that they started to fall away and rebel as recorded in the book of Judges. If we consider the longer chronology as true, then Noah would have passed on 181 years prior to Babel and Shem would have passed on 29 years prior to the Babel event. In light of this, it would make much more sense that Babel would have been over 500 years after the flood.

Additional Information

Henry B. Smith Jr. documents the following in his paper - *The case for the Septuagint's chronology in Genesis 5 and 11 (2018 ICC)*

Demetrius the Chronographer (ca. 220 BC) dated creation to 5307 BC

Eupolemus (ca. 160 BC), who was a Jewish historian, came up with the same date of 5307 BC for creation.

Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum (1st century AD) was originally written in Hebrew and has the longer numbers (with a few re-constructible scribal errors)

Josephus, writing after the fall of Jerusalem around 94 AD and working from a Hebrew text and translating it into Greek, comes up with a time of the written history of the Jews of about 5000 years. This would put creation around 5425 BC.

It appears that the Hebrew text was changed sometime in about the 2nd or 3rd century AD.

Based on this information, one needs to ask "which chronology fits the text and the evidence"?

It would certainly appear that the only way the text makes sense is if the longer chronology is correct, otherwise Abraham would not have died at a "ripe old age". Most of his ancestors lived longer than he did. (In the MT text, only Nahor would not have lived as long) By the time of Abraham, even 100 years was considered old according to the text. Also, consider that just over 100 years after Abraham's death, Pharaoh is seemingly quite intrigued by Jacob's age, indicating that the long lifespans had subsided by this time.

Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many years have you lived?" So Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; (Gen. 47:8-9)