

How Old was Father Abraham?

Re-examining the Patriarchal Lifespans in Light of Archaeology

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Abstract

The long lifespans in Genesis are only a problem for those who hold to inerrancy. If the patriarchal narratives are merely legends, then exaggerated lifespans fit right in. However for those who believe Genesis records actual events about real people, the lifespans raise significant questions. Skeletal and tooth wear data from ancient times indicates an average lifespan of around forty years old, not over 900 years as in Genesis 5, or even the almost 200 years of the later patriarchs. But the problems are not limited to scientific data outside the Bible. A face-value reading of the patriarchal ages contradicts other Scriptures. Plus, a chronology based on these lifespans is biblically inconsistent, and contradicts the archaeology of the Intermediate Bronze and Middle Bronze ages.

Two approaches have been used to reconcile these unusual lifespans with historical reality. The concordist approach attempts to show that the biblical text is actually in harmony with an unbiased reading of the scientific evidence. The accommodationist approach acknowledges the conflict and accepts that the divine author of Genesis may have allowed pre-scientific language and perhaps even erroneous concepts in order to portray truth to the original audience.

This paper will outline reasons from both inside and outside the Bible why the patriarchal lifespans were never intended to be read as face value numbers, and will survey a history of interpretation. This paper proposes that the Genesis genealogies reflect the authentic Middle Bronze age practice of using schematic and exaggerated lifespans. A symbolic interpretation of the patriarchal lifespans from an evangelical perspective will be proposed and defended, and the proposal will be applied to other extraordinary lifespans in Scripture.

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Introduction

The long lifespans of the patriarchs present a problem for those who believe that Genesis records actual historical people and events. The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy states that “Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching ... *about the events of world history.*”¹ But these lifespans are outside the known extent of human longevity and seem to add a mythical or legendary quality to the narratives. There is no evidence of anyone at any time in history living these types of lifespans, and a chronology based on a face value reading does not match the archaeological evidence we find in the ancient Near East. So, taking the ages in Genesis at face value actually undermines the historicity of Genesis and exposes the text to the possibility that it is historically inaccurate. Simply adding gaps into the genealogies does not solve the conflict of these lifespans with what is currently known about the events of world history.

Like earlier clashes between science and Scripture, responses to this conflict have gravitated toward two extremes. On one end, critical scholars accepted the conflict and chose the scientific evidence over the Scripture. They embraced a legendary explanation for the long lifespans and dismissed any notion that Genesis contains genuine historical truth.

At the other end, conservative scholars chose Scripture over scientific evidence and accepted these ages at face value. Their presupposition was that the divine author ensured that the Bible was inerrant and infallible in what it asserted. So, if these lifespans contradict the anthropological or archaeological evidence discovered to date, then that evidence is either incomplete or misinterpreted.

The primary response from evangelicals to conflicts between science and the Bible has been concordism. The belief is that apparent contradictions between science and the Scriptures will be debunked by future scientific discoveries or an unbiased examination of the evidence. The other major response to the conflict between science and the biblical text is that of accommodation. This view argues that God “accommodated” his revelation to fit the ancient, pre-scientific worldview. Now, it is clearly true that God had to communicate using the language and idioms of the culture in which the Bible was written. But some accommodationists are comfortable asserting that the Bible may contain scientific or historical errors.

The concordist interpretation—that science will one day prove these lifespans to be correct—is based on several assumptions. First, that everyone prior to the critical scholars of the

¹ Point four of the Short Statement, italics added. This doctrine is expanded and supported in Articles IX, XI, and XII.

nineteenth century took these lifespans at face value. Second, the human and the divine author of Genesis used numbers the same way that we do today. So, if we do not take these ages at face value we are not interpreting the Bible “literally” or we are changing the biblical text. Third, that the long lifespans, and a chronology based on them, is consistent within the Bible and with archaeological evidence outside the Bible. This presentation will challenge each of these assumptions and present the case for a symbolic interpretation of the lifespans in Genesis.

In order to do that, I will present reasons why the lifespans cannot be face value numbers, and I will overview the history of interpretation. Unfortunately, there is not the time to examine how ages and reigns were recorded in the ancient Near East, or to present the case that these numbers are clearly schematic. But I will propose a solution that honors the author’s intent by interpreting the lifespans within the cultural and linguistic context of the original readers of Genesis and supports the historicity of Genesis. It is my contention that bestowing honor upon ancient ancestors by exaggerated lifespans was a common ancient practice. Schematic lifespans actually support the antiquity of the text, while the face value interpretation aligns more naturally with the way ages were recorded—as face value numbers—from the time of the monarchy.

Why the Lifespans Cannot be Face Value Numbers

Eugene Merrill says, “A basic rule of interpretation is to understand a text literally unless and until there are compelling reasons to do otherwise. Such a compulsion is demonstrably not the case with the Genesis narratives.”² But I believe it demonstrably *is* the case with the Genesis narratives because there are many “compelling reasons” to question a face value interpretation of the patriarchal lifespans. This paper will summarize these reasons by examining the lifespans themselves, and a chronology constructed using those lifespans. We will examine these two issues from outside and then inside the Bible.

Problems Outside the Bible: Long Lifespans

The problem is that these extended lifespans clearly contradict all known evidence. The evidence from skeletons and tooth wear shows that the average lifespan in antiquity was around forty years.³ There has not been presented any credible archaeological or anthropological

² Eugene H. Merrill, “The Lifespans of the EB–MB Patriarchs: A Hermeneutical and Historical Conundrum,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 57, no. 2 (Spring 2015), 278.

³ Jesper L. Boldsen and Richard R. Paine, “The Evolution of Human Longevity from the Mesolithic to the Middle Ages: An Analysis Based on Skeletal Data,” in *Exceptional Longevity: From Prehistory to the Present*, Odense Monographs on Population Aging, ed. James W. Vaupel and Bernard Jeune (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 1995), 25-36. Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Attitudes Toward the Aged in Antiquity,” *Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin* 45 (2000), 2.

evidence of any human living past 120 years old.⁴ This is true for all of the anthropological evidence of early human civilizations, including those much earlier in history than the patriarchal era, or even the antediluvian era.⁵ As just one example, excavations at Jericho show human occupation back to ca. 9000 BC, and have revealed the contents of over 500 tombs.⁶ The ages at death of these skeletal remains fit the profile of normal human lifespans.⁷

This scientific evidence is supported by the historical documentation thus far discovered including that from both Egypt and Mesopotamia. Egyptian records reveal that the ancient Pharaohs ruled for a few months or several years, a few ruled for up to fifty years and very rarely even longer (Pepi II: ~ninety years, Rameses II: sixty-seven years). But these indicate the Pharaohs lived normal human lifespans, not hundreds of years.⁸ The data are identical for the Mesopotamian and Babylonian kings.⁹ All of the archaeological evidence from the Bronze Age confirms that people in ancient cultures lived shorter lifespans than we do today, not longer.

So, how can a serious biblical scholar explain these extended lifespans, which have no external attestation? One strategy is to claim the common saying, “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.” However, there are many cases in which the absence of evidence does indeed constitute evidence of absence.¹⁰ One could use the phrase “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence” with the claim that there is a flea in the room, but not with the claim that there is an elephant in the room. One expects to see evidence of an elephant in a room but does not expect to see evidence of a flea.

⁴ “International Database on Longevity,” *Max Planck Society for the Advancement of Science*, www.supercentenarians.org (accessed Sep 29, 2014).

⁵ Boldsen and Paine, “Evolution of Human Longevity,” There are, of course, different views on the timing of the flood. Suffice it to say the Mesolithic era is prior to the flood, whichever date is chosen for it.

⁶ Soren Blau, “An Analysis of Human Skeletal Remains from two Middle Bronze Age Tombs from Jericho,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 138, no. 1 (2006): 13

⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸ J. J. Bimson and Eugene Merrill argue unsuccessfully that the reigns of the Egyptian Pharaohs prove that unusually long ages were possible during this era. Actually, the data reveal the opposite. The longest ruling Pharaoh, Pepi II, began his rule when he was six years old, so even his age is not outside the maximum human lifespan. The other evidence Bimson cites is either speculation or undocumented. J. J. Bimson, “Archaeological Data and the Dating of the Patriarchs,” in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, ed. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 91-92, n. 143. Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 45 n. 19.

⁹ John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 58.

¹⁰ J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 156-57.

If lifespans of hundreds of years were the common experience for the entire population in antiquity, as the Bible seems to teach, then we should expect to have found at least some evidence of this in the explosion of archaeological discovery over the last century or more. Since no such evidence has been found, it seems more and more likely that such lifespans did not, in fact, occur. One skeleton would not be enough to challenge the current consensus. It would need to be many hundreds of skeletons distributed over all regions.

One option might be to claim the extended lifespans were miracles. However, I can find no scholars who embrace this solution, perhaps because Genesis does not portray these lifespans as miracles. Instead the patriarchs “died at a good old age . . . full of years” (Gen 25:8). These were important individuals and they lived full lives to a good old age. But their lifespans are portrayed as being the best one could normally expect rather than being miraculous.

One common concordist theory, put forth in 1961 by Henry Morris Jr. and John Whitcomb, proposed a layer of water vapor in the upper atmosphere prior to the flood. Under this theory, the water vapor layer distributed the sun’s energy evenly and filtered out harmful UV radiation thus providing an ideal environment to foster human growth and minimize mortality. This was thought to explain the uniformly long pre-flood lifespans and—since the water vapor rained down during the flood—it could also explain the descending lifespans after the flood.¹¹

However, this does not constitute proof that such a thing actually happened. Morris and Whitcomb admitted, “we can as yet point to no definite scientific verification of this pristine vapor protective envelope around the earth.”¹² Since then, despite abundant scientific research into the historic atmosphere of earth, not one drop of water vapor evidence has appeared for such a canopy. Instead, a growing chorus of evangelical scientists has argued that this canopy could not have existed, and would not have provided a beneficial environment if it had. In fact, the idea of a water vapor canopy has even been abandoned by many Young Earth Creation (YEC) advocates, and for several valid reasons.¹³ One of the most obvious problems is that this theory implies that all life forms—plants, animals, fish, birds, and beetles—enjoyed long lives in this pristine environment, which is not what the fossil record shows.

The vapor canopy theory also contradicts known laws of physics. As creation scientist, Gary Johnson, noted, “A miracle would have been required to maintain the canopies

¹¹ Henry M. Morris and John C. Whitcomb, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961), 121, 240-258, 399.

¹² *Ibid.*, 241.

¹³ Bodie Hodge, “The Collapse of the Canopy Model,” <https://answersingenesis.org/environmental-science/the-collapse-of-the-canopy-model/> (accessed Oct 19, 2016). Jonathan Sarfati, “Flood Models and Biblical Realism,” *Journal of Creation* 24, no. 3 (2010): 46-53.

above the earth, or some as yet undiscovered physical phenomenon.”¹⁴ The heat released when such a large quantity of water vapor condensed to liquid water would have heated earth’s atmosphere to 2,100°C (3,812°F).¹⁵ Even a small water vapor barrier would produce surface temperatures on the earth far too high to support life. Creation scientist, Larry Vardiman, concluded that for any water vapor canopy to have existed the solar radiation from the sun would have had to be merely 25% of what it is today.¹⁶

After the demise of the vapor canopy theory, the current concordist theory being proposed is that genetics played a role in the extraordinary lifespans in Genesis and the decrease in lifespans after the flood.¹⁷ John Sanford argues that the human genome shows degeneration over time as it accumulates mostly negative mutations. This degeneration, he argues, shows “evolution going backwards,” and is responsible for decreasing lifespans. Second, he argues that the decline of lifespans after the flood listed in Genesis 11 fits a biological decay curve.¹⁸

However, Sanford’s explanation raises significant problems. The supposedly tight fit between the biblical numbers and a biological decay curve does not work unless there was a “genetic bottleneck” at the Flood when the world’s population was reduced down to just eight people. So, his explanation is dependent on a worldwide flood, and on the absence of gaps in the genealogy in Genesis 11. Both of these propositions lack external support, and both rest on assumptions that are not shared even among evangelicals.

None of the human remains discovered thus far—stretching back to well before any date proposed for the Flood—show any signs of living for hundreds of years, or of reduced lifespans fitting a biological decay curve. Even if we grant Sanford’s major argument—that there is a tight fit between the ages in Genesis 11 and a biological decay curve—that does not prove

¹⁴ Gary L. Johnson, “Global Heat Balance with a Liquid Water and Ice Canopy,” *Creation Research Science Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (1986), 61.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁶ Larry Vardiman, “Temperature Profiles for an Optimized Water Vapor Canopy,” *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Creationism* (2003), 33. Despite these problems, Andrew Snelling continues to hold that a small vapor canopy may have existed even as he acknowledges that, “the amount of water that could have been held in a vapor canopy would not have been sufficient to contribute significantly to the rainfall, and thus the waters of the globe-encircling, mountain-covering Genesis Flood.” Andrew A. Snelling, *Earth’s Catastrophic Past: Geology, Creation & the Flood*, vol II (Dallas: Institute for Creation Research, 2009), 667.

¹⁷ Carl Wieland, “Decreasing Lifespans: Have We Been Looking in the Right Place?,” *Journal of Creation* 8, no. 2 (1994): 138-41. Brian Thomas, “Did Adam Really Live 930 Years?,” <http://www.icr.org/article/did-adam-really-live-930-years/> (accessed Oct 21, 2016).

¹⁸ John Sanford, Jim Pamplin, and Christopher Rupe, “Genetic Entropy Recorded in the Bible?,” <http://www.logosra.org/genetic-entropy> (accessed Oct 21, 2016). John C. Sanford, *Genetic Entropy*, 4th ed. (n.c.: FMS Publications, 2014).

anything. The numbers in the Sumerian King List fit the same profile and nobody believes they reflect accurate lifespans.

Problems Outside the Bible: Chronology

A chronology based on a face value reading of patriarchal lifespans places the patriarchs living from 2166 BC (Abram's birth) to 1806 BC (Joseph's death).¹⁹ This covers the final two centuries of the Intermediate Bronze Age (IBA, 2500–1950 BC), and the first two centuries of Middle Bronze Age (MB I, 1950–1800 BC). However, this chronology is at odds with current archaeological findings.²⁰ The events recorded in Genesis could not have occurred during the IBA. A better fit is the Middle Bronze Age, specifically the MB II (1800–1550 BC).²¹ Although the archaeological evidence can be interpreted in different ways, one consensus shared by both biblical and secular archaeologists is the lack of any walled cities or sedentary population in Canaan during the IBA (2500–1950 BC).²²

There are four main reasons why this time period does not fit that of the biblical patriarchs. The first problem is the lack of trade and travel between Canaan and Egypt. Abraham's sojourn in Egypt (Gen 12:10-13:1) may have been possible during the IBA. However, the fact that there was no eastern royal residence in lower Egypt during this time—only the capital much further south in Memphis—would seem to make Abraham's visit to the “house of Pharaoh” unlikely (Gen 12:15).²³

¹⁹ Eugene H. Merrill, “Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 547 (1980), 248. Bimson, “Archaeological Data,” 84.

²⁰ Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert: A History of the Negev* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1959), 68-69. Bimson, “Archaeological Data,” 84-85. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 42, 96. On these pages, Merrill argues strongly that Abraham lived before 2000 BC. But in his supporting footnotes, Merrill seems to agree with Bright, and Provan, Long, and Longman that Abraham lived after 2000 BC. Merrill does not seem to provide any support for his early dating of Abraham other than his presupposition that the patriarchal ages must be taken as numerical values. The sources Merrill quotes as supporting his view, but which actually oppose his view, are found in John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th ed., Westminster Aids to the Study of the Scriptures (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 85. Iain W. Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper III Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 113.

²¹ Kenneth A. Kitchen, “The Patriarchal Age: Myth or History?,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21, no. 2 (1995): 48-57, 88, 90, 92, 94.

²² Amihay Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: 10,000–586 B.C.E.*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 151-54. Israel Finkelstein, “When and How Did the Israelites Emerge?” in *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel*, ed. Brian B. Schmidt, Archaeology and Biblical Studies, edited by Andrew G. Vaughn, vol. 17 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 80.

²³ K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 319.

Second, for at least a century prior to 2000 BC all of Mesopotamia was united under the Third Dynasty of Ur.²⁴ There could not have been a coalition of kings from the region of Babylonia and Elam who joined forces to subjugate the Cities of the Plain (Gen 14).²⁵

Third, the lack of archaeological sites integral to the narratives from the IBA seems to present an insurmountable problem. Finkelstein summarizes the situation, “important biblical sites that are mentioned in the Abraham stories, such as Shechem, Beer-sheba, and Hebron, did not yield finds from the Intermediate Bronze Age (IBA). These sites were simply not inhabited at that time.”²⁶ Merrill notes that Shechem is not described as a city when Abraham stopped there (Gen 12:6, cf. Gen 33:18), so that could be consistent with evidence that the city was abandoned between 3300 and 1900 BC.²⁷ But, more problematic are missing sites like Bethel/Luz and Ai (Gen 12:8, 13:3, 29:19),²⁸ Gerar (Gen 20:1-2),²⁹ Dan/Laish (Gen 14:14),³⁰ and Hebron (Gen 13:18, 14:13, 18:1, 23:1, 17-19, 25:9).³¹

Fourth, there was no city of Salem (Jerusalem) during the IBA, and thus no king/priest named Melchizedek (cf. Gen 14:18-20).³² Kathleen Kenyon stated, “Trench 1, therefore, takes us back to ca. 1800 BC. Our excavations suggest that a case can be made out that

²⁴ William W. Hallo and William Kelly Simpson, *The Ancient Near East: A History*, 2nd ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998), 72-80.

²⁵ Kitchen, *Reliability of the OT*, 320. Hallo and Simpson, *The Ancient Near East*, 92-93.

²⁶ Israel Finkelstein, “Patriarchs, Exodus, Conquest: Fact or Fiction?” in *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel*, SBL Archaeology and Biblical Studies, ed. Brian B. Schmidt (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 44.

²⁷ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 49. Itzhak Magen, “Shechem,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. Ephraim Stern (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society & Carta, 1993), 1347.

²⁸ William G. Dever and W. Malcolm Clark, “The Patriarchal Traditions,” in *Israelite and Judean History*, ed. John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 99.

²⁹ Eliezer D. Oren, “Tel Haror,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. Ephraim Stern (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 580.

³⁰ Avraham Biran, “Dan,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. Ephraim Stern (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society & Carta, 1993), 324.

³¹ Dever and Clark, “The Patriarchal Traditions,” 99-100. Avi Ofer, “Hebron,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. Ephraim Stern (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 608.

³² Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham*, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, vol. 133 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1974), 183. Yigal Shiloh, “Jerusalem: Excavation Results, Chalcolithic Period to Iron Age I,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. Ephraim Stern (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 701.

there was a walled town from this date.”³³ However, for the IBA, it is clear there was no walled city at Jerusalem. Kenyon found “almost no evidence” of any organized group around Jerusalem during this time, the only exception being the graves used by a semi-nomadic group some 15 miles north of Jerusalem. More recent excavations have confirmed these findings. There was an EBA population in Jerusalem, and a walled city during the MB II, but not in between these two periods, during the IBA.³⁴

Thus, our current knowledge of the external events and conditions during the IBA lead us to reject this as a possibility for the Patriarchal Age. No archaeological evidence discovered to date would support this assertion. However, the MBA does not suffer from the same difficulty. The four reasons that disqualified the IBA become four reasons that the MBA could be considered a suitable era for the patriarchal age.

First, the long-range travels of the patriarchs could very plausibly have occurred during the MBA, especially Abraham’s visit to Egypt.³⁵ Not only was there contact between Egyptians and visiting Asiatics, but the Egyptian Pharaohs of the twelfth to fifteenth dynasties (ca. 1700–1540 BC) kept an East Delta residence near Avaris. This was significantly closer to Canaan and is thus a much more plausible “house of Pharaoh” for Abraham to visit.³⁶

Second, the MBA (and more specifically ca. 2000–1650 BC) represents the only period of time when four kings from the north and east (Babylonia and Elam) could have formed a coalition to subdue the five Cities of the Plain (Gen 14).³⁷

Third, the requisite sites are occupied during the MBA. Shechem could be described as a city-state from around 1900 BC.³⁸ Hebron was a fortified city in the MBA,³⁹ as was Bethel/Luz.⁴⁰ Laish (Dan) is mentioned in the Egyptian Execration texts and Mari documents

³³ Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Digging up Jerusalem* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 78.

³⁴ Jane M. Cahill and David Tarler, “Excavations Directed by Yigal Shiloh at the City of David, 1978–1985,” in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. Hillel Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 32. Israel Finkelstein, “The Central Hill Country in the Intermediate Bronze Age,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 41, no. 1-3 (1991), 21-29.

³⁵ Kitchen, *Reliability of the OT*, 316-18. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land*, 185-88.

³⁶ Kitchen, *Reliability of the OT*, 318-19.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 320-23.

³⁸ Magen, “Shechem,” 1346.

³⁹ Dever and Clark, “The Patriarchal Traditions,” 99. Ofer, “Hebron,” 608.

⁴⁰ James Leon Kelso, “Bethel,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. Ephraim Stern (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society & Carta, 1993), 193.

from ca. 1800 BC.⁴¹ Gerar was one of the largest cities in southern Canaan during the MBA.⁴² Kitchen summarizes the situation by saying, “Most of the modest number of stopping places linked with the patriarchs were in business during the first half of the second millennium.”⁴³

The archaeology at Beersheba shows occupation during the Iron Age, but none during the IBA or the MBA. However, despite the protestations of some critical scholars,⁴⁴ the patriarchal narrative describes Beersheba as a group of wells, not as a town (Gen 21:14, 19, 30-33, 22:19, 26:23-25, 32, 28:10, 46:1, 5). The only mention of Beersheba as a town is in Genesis 26:33, which is an obvious later update to the text (“... to this day”).⁴⁵ So, even though the site of Beersheba lacks evidence of occupation in either the IBA or the MBA, that does not mean that either age is ruled out by the lack of pre-Iron Age remains.

Jerusalem was a fortified city with an encircling wall beginning around 1800 BC (beginning of MB II).⁴⁶ Thus MB II presents a possible timeframe for the king/priest of Salem, Melchizedek (“King of Righteousness” cf. Heb 7:1-2), whereas the earlier IBA does not.

So, any chronology that has Abraham living during the IBA is at odds with not only a few Bible verses but also all currently known archaeological findings in the region. However, there is a time period where external events do seem to correspond with the biblical narrative. During the Middle Bronze Age, and more specifically, the MB II (1800–1550 BC).

The first half of the twentieth century was marked by discoveries at Nuzi (fifteenth century BC) and Mari (eighteenth or seventeenth century BC), which seemed to show remarkable parallels to the unusual customs in the patriarchal narratives. This led to an optimistic claim of consensus about the historicity of the Patriarchal Age. This consensus was challenged in the latter half of the twentieth century and many supposed parallels were rightly discarded. However, not every parallel was shown to be false, and to the extent that they are valid, they seem to confirm an early second-millennium milieu for the patriarchal narratives.

⁴¹ Biran, “Dan,” 324.

⁴² Oren, “Tel Haror,” 580.

⁴³ Kitchen, *Reliability of the OT*, 335. See also Amihai Mazar, “The Patriarchs, Exodus, and Conquest Narratives in Light of Archaeology,” in *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel*, SBL Archaeology and Biblical Studies, ed. Brian B. Schmidt (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 58. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 82.

⁴⁴ John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 111-12.

⁴⁵ Kitchen, *Reliability of the OT*, 336. Bimson, “Archaeological Data,” 75. See also Sarna’s response to Van Seters in Nahum M. Sarna, “Abraham in History,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 3 (1977), 8-9.

⁴⁶ Shiloh, “Jerusalem,” 698, 701-702.

Kitchen has identified elements such as a wide scope of travel, long-distance marriages, monotheistic worship, and the personal names in Genesis, which are very comfortable in the second millennium.⁴⁷ However, he also finds parallels that fit a narrower chronological window. First, the structure and form of treaties can help pinpoint the time when they were enacted. The format used by the patriarchs in four treaties (Gen 21:23-24, 27-33, 26:28-31, 31:44-54) corresponds with treaties found in the Mari archives and at Tell Leilan for the early second millennium BC. Second, the price of slaves changed over time. The price of twenty shekels for Joseph (Gen 37:28) corresponds to the slave price in the Law of Hammurapi and the Mari documents for the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries BC.⁴⁸

It is true that these social customs were practiced over a wide area over a long time frame. Thus their ability to pinpoint a specific patriarchal age is minimal at best.⁴⁹ Yet, if there is no consensus arising from these cultural parallels, the most common view is that these customs best fit within the first half of the second millennium, i.e. the MBA.⁵⁰

This writer is unaware of any scholar who has proposed a third-millennium (IBA) setting for the patriarchal narratives based on cultural parallels. Merrill and J. J. Bimson posit a late third-millennium date for Abraham's life by adding up the patriarchal lifespans as numerical values, not on the basis of any cultural parallels between this time and the patriarchal narratives.⁵¹ That is, they maintain a strict face value interpretation of the patriarchal lifespans as inerrant at the expense of both the external events and the parallel social customs revealed by archaeology. This approach seems unbalanced at best.

Problems Inside the Bible: Long Lifespans

First, the statement that "Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years" (Gen 25:8, NIV) is clearly false if the ages of his ancestors are literal

⁴⁷ Kitchen, *Reliability of the OT*, 316-43.

⁴⁸ Kitchen, "The Patriarchal Age," 52-56. Kitchen, *Reliability of the OT*, 344-45.

⁴⁹ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 8-9.

⁵⁰ Mazar, "Patriarchs, Exodus, and Conquest Narratives," 59. Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel*, trans. David Smith (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978. Orig. *Histoire ancienne d'Israël*, Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 1973), 156. Abraham Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East, ed. Baruch Halpern and M. H. E. Weippert, vol. 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 4. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 70, 77, 83, 85-86. Dever and Clark, "The Patriarchal Traditions," 95. C. H. Gordon, "Biblical Customs and the Nuzu Tablets," *Biblical Archaeologist* 3, no. 1 (1940), 2. Kitchen, "The Patriarchal Age". Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts, vol. 2 (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), xxii.

⁵¹ Merrill, "Fixed Dates". Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 47-48, 96, c.f. 55-56. Bimson, "Archaeological Data," 83-84.

numerical values. If the pre-Abrahamic ages are assumed to be a gapless chronology, then all of Abraham's post-flood ancestors were his contemporaries and four of them—Shem, Arphaxad, Shelah, and Eber—were still alive when Abraham entered Canaan, with Eber and Shem outliving him (Gen 11:10-32). Yet the text treats these men as respected ancestors, not contemporaries. There is no hint that these men were living at the same time as Abraham, and the narrative would not make sense if they were. Why would God choose Abraham to be the father of the Hebrews if their namesake—Eber—were still alive? Abraham is the first man in Scripture who is called an old man and is said to have lived a full life. But, how can that be when he lived a much shorter life than his ancestors?

The concordist solution for this dilemma is to posit that the genealogies are “open” rather than “closed.”⁵² But this does not solve the problem. Abraham's paltry lifespan of 175 cannot be described as “a good old age . . . full of years.” It pales in comparison with Shem (600), Eber (464), Methuselah (969), Noah (950) and even the relative youngsters Enoch (365), or Terah (205). If those ages were intended as numerical values, whether there are gaps in the genealogies or not, Abraham did not die an old man, he was a mere youth.

Second, Abraham's disbelieving laughter at the possibility of fathering a child at 100 years old (Gen 17:15-19) clearly indicates that he did not believe his ancestors fathered children at 130 (Adam and Terah), 187 (Methuselah), or 500 years old (Noah).⁵³ Sarah also laughed at the prospect of bearing a child when she was ninety (Gen 18:9-15). Jeremy Sexton says, “Abraham's laughter, whatever it means, does not imply that 100 years old was an unusual age for a man to have children.”⁵⁴ However, that is exactly what the text not only implies but explicitly states. Abraham's incredulous questions are, “Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years *old*? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years *old*, bear a child?” (Gen 17:17). Similarly, the narrator spells it out by saying, “Now Abraham and Sarah were *old*, well advanced in age; and Sarah had *passed the age of childbearing*” (Gen 18:11). Sarah's disbelief is reflected in her reference to both herself and her husband being *old* (Gen 18:12). Even Yahweh's response assumes that it is impossible for someone so *old* to bear a child (Gen 18:13-14).

⁵² Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 269-70. Morris and Whitcomb, *The Genesis Flood*, 474-89. Eugene H. Merrill, “Chronology,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 118-20.

⁵³ Jeremy Hughes, *Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, vol. 66 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 11.

⁵⁴ Jeremy Sexton, “Who Was Born when Enoch Was 90?: A Semantic Reevaluation of William Henry Green's Chronological Gaps,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 77 (2015), 217.

The major point in the passage is that Isaac's conception and birth was a miracle, not a normal occurrence. Yet the face value reading of the patriarchal ages seems to remove the miraculous element from Isaac's birth.

Problems Inside the Bible: Chronology

The problems with long lifespans within the Bible are significant but relatively few. However, when we turn to a chronology based on those lifespans the problems multiply. However, we only have space to examine a few of these problems.

First, granting that Sarah was barren, why did she wait until she was seventy-five to give up hope of bearing a child (Gen 16:3, 17:17)? She was not counting on a miracle—in fact, she laughed when Isaac was promised—she was still holding out hope of having her own child up to the age of seventy-four. It was only then that Sarah proposed Hagar as a surrogate mother.

Second, why would Sarah be attractive as a wife to Abimelech at the age of eighty-nine or ninety (Gen 20:1-2)?⁵⁵ The reoccurring themes in Genesis 19 and 21 seem to indicate that Sarah was taken into Abimelech's harem between the destruction of Sodom and the birth of Isaac.⁵⁶ So Sarah really was eighty-nine or ninety years old in a face-value reading of the text. Hardly a worthy contestant for the "Miss Abimelech" pageant!

Third, none of the patriarchs is ever recorded as relating to his grandchildren, except when Jacob blesses Joseph's sons (Gen 48). If Abraham were alive for fifteen years after the birth of Jacob, why does the text never mention them meeting? Isaac was silent when his granddaughter, Dinah, was raped (Gen 34). And, in the face value reading, he was alive when the favored grandson, Joseph, was purportedly killed (Gen 37:2, 31-35). We would expect at least some reaction from Isaac in the face of such a tragedy.

But perhaps the greatest incongruence is imagining Jacob at seventy-seven years old falling head over heels in love with Rachel and eagerly volunteering to work seven years for her hand (Gen 29:10-20). That means he waited until the ripe old age of eighty-four to get married. Then, after eighty-four long years in celibacy, Jacob fathered twelve children in seven years. In fact, if Jacob's age is taken at face value, then he fathered children from the ages of eighty-four to 105 (Benjamin was born after the Dinah incident at Shechem, Gen 35:16-20). That seems to

⁵⁵ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation*, The JPS Torah Commentary, ed. Nahum M. Sarna and Chaim Potok (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 141.

⁵⁶ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews, vol. 1B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 248-49. J. P. Fokkeman, "Time and the Structure of the Abraham Cycle," in *New Avenues in the Study of the Old Testament: A Collection of Old Testament Studies Published on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap and the Retirement of Prof. Dr. M. J. Mulder*, Oudtestamentische Studiën, ed. A. S. van der Woude, (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 109.

contradict to the fact that Abraham believed ninety-nine was laughably old for someone to father a child (Gen 17:17), and it lessens the miraculous element in the birth of Isaac.

Most evangelical commentaries simply ignore this inconsistency.⁵⁷ None offer an explanation as to how Jacob could act like a love-struck teenager when he was seventy-seven, and then father twelve children after eighty-four candles overwhelmed his own birthday cake. Plus, the text of Genesis 27 implies that Jacob's flight to Haran occurred very soon after Esau's marriage to Canaanite women. Rebekah expressed concern to Isaac that Jacob might also marry Canaanite women (Gen 27:46). This seems to be an unlikely sentiment if Jacob had remained celibate for thirty-seven years after his brother's marriages. It also seems inconceivable that Esau only realized his Canaanite wives displeased his father after thirty-six years (Gen 28:6-8).

So, even within the biblical text, a face value reading of the patriarchal lifespans results in a few problems with the lifespans themselves, and several problems with the internal chronology. The concordist approach seeks to explain some of these incompatibilities by proposing open rather than closed genealogies, but the problems still remain.

History of Interpretation

It is commonly assumed that everyone took the lifespans at face value before the critical scholars of the nineteenth century. However, written records of how people interpreted the lifespans in Genesis do not appear until after ca. 300 BC. The earliest records are the Septuagint (beginning in ca. 250 BC), and the Samaritan Pentateuch (ca. 120 BC) translations. The ages listed in the LXX and the SP for the ancestors in Genesis 5 and 11 diverge significantly from the Masoretic Text, and the scholarly consensus seems to be that these were alterations from the original numbers preserved in the MT.⁵⁸ But, the time gap between the composition of Genesis and the LXX translation is either just over or just under a millennium depending on whether one holds to an early or a late Exodus.

⁵⁷ There is no comment in John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis–Leviticus*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 241-42. Similarly, the problem is not addressed in Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 75. Mathews is apparently unaware of Jacob's advanced age when he comments on Jacob's "amazing strength" in singlehandedly rolling the stone off the well. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 463. Hamilton calls this feat "herculean" and "Samsonesque" but also does not address Jacob's age. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 255. Walton notes that almost a century has passed between Rebekah's marriage and her son, Jacob, beginning to court a bride. But he does not comment on how unusual that situation would be. John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 586.

⁵⁸ Jeremy Sexton has recently argued for the priority of the LXX lifespans in Genesis 5 and 11 over those in the MT. However, the differences seem to be better explained as the LXX smoothing out some of the Hebrew text's difficulties rather than vice versa. Sexton, "Who was Born," 212-18.

It is true that early Jewish interpreters like Demetrius the Chronographer (ca. 200 BC), Eupolemus (ca. 160 BC), the book of Jubilees (ca. 150 BC), and Josephus (in *Antiquities of the Jews*, ca. AD 94) all took the numbers in Genesis at face value. However, like the LXX translators, they also showed a willingness to change the numbers for their own purposes. Demetrius fabricated lifespans not in the Scriptures to fit a pre-determined scheme.⁵⁹ Eupolemus seemed to be using a repeating pattern of 480 years to coincide with the Maccabean liberation of Jerusalem in his day.⁶⁰ The writer of Jubilees freely condensed, purged, supplemented, or changed the biblical chronology to fit Israel's history into a series of "weeks of years" and "jubilees of years" (i.e., seven years and forty-nine years). Josephus believed the teaching of the Oral Torah, recorded later in the Talmud, "The world is to exist six thousand years; the first two thousand years are to be void; the next two thousand years are the period of the Torah, and the following two thousand years are the period of the Messiah."⁶¹ This seems to be in line with his apologetic purpose to establish the antiquity of the Jewish people over that of the Greeks, Babylonians, and Egyptians, which he explains in detail at the beginning of *Against Apion*.⁶²

Like the Jewish chronographers before them, Christian chronographers based their calculations on the belief that there were 6,000 years of history corresponding to the six days of creation. This was certainly true for Julius Africanus, writing in AD 221, and Eusebius's *Chronicle* (ca. AD 325). It explains why the Christian writers used the LXX as the basis for their chronologies.⁶³ Since the LXX could account for over 5,000 years of history (5,500 in Africanus's chronology), it meant the 1,000-year reign of Messiah—corresponding to the Sabbath day of creation—was near. This reasoning was, and still is, used in many chronologies, including that of Archbishop Ussher. He used the MT figures for the opposite reason that Africanus used the LXX figures. In Ussher's day it was known that Jesus Christ was likely born in 4 BC, so his date of creation was exactly 4,000 years earlier at 4004 BC. This meant that by

⁵⁹ Ben Zion Wacholder, "How Long did Abram Stay in Egypt? A Study in Hellenistic, Quran, and Rabbinic Chronology," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 35 (1964), 51 n. 42.

⁶⁰ Hughes, *Secrets of the Times*, 243-44.

⁶¹ I. Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud: Abodah Zarah*, Hebrew-English ed. (London: Socino, 1988), 9a.

⁶² *Against Apion* 1:1-45. Josephus, *The Life. Against Apion*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 162-81.

⁶³ Sextus Iulius Africanus, *Iulius Africanus Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments*, trans. William Adler, *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der Ersten Jahrhunderte*, ed. Martin Wallraff, Umberto Roberto, and Karl Pinggéra, vol. 15 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), XXIII. See also Psalm 90:4, II Peter 3:8.

Ussher's day—the mid-seventeenth century AD—the 6,000 years of history was approaching the end when the Messianic age would begin.⁶⁴

Eusebius's goal was an apologetic one—to demonstrate the antiquity of Moses was greater than that of other cultures, particularly Greece.⁶⁵ Eusebius's work was replaced within a few centuries by the chronologies of others (notably that of Jerome) who used his dates as a starting point, but his foundational scheme was not seriously challenged until the time of the Reformation.

Martin Luther and John Calvin depicted the consensus view of their day that the lifespans in the MT text of Genesis be taken at face value.⁶⁶ Like others before them, the 6,000-year scheme of history featured prominently.⁶⁷ The medieval writers found the approximate 4,000 years from creation to Christ in the MT to be significant, although they each computed the numbers slightly differently.

In AD 1650, at the dawn of the modern era, Archbishop James Ussher famously took the data in Genesis as literal ages to create his chronology.⁶⁸ He was strongly influenced by the 6,000-year arrangement of history, as others before him had been, and his chronology deliberately incorporated schematic round numbers. For example, according to Ussher the first Temple was completed in the 3,000th year after creation, and Christ—the anti-type of the temple—was born in the 4,000th year after creation.⁶⁹

So, the evidence does not support the common notion that everyone interpreted these lifespans at face value until the nineteenth century. Such a statement ignores approximately 1,000 years of biblical interpretation. What we can say is that there is no extant evidence of any chronological speculation or calculation until the translation of the LXX (ca. 300 BC) at the

⁶⁴ James Barr, "Why the World Was Created in 4004 B.C.: Archbishop Ussher and Biblical Chronology," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67 (1985), 581.

⁶⁵ Alden A. Mosshammer, *The Chronicle of Eusebius and Greek Chronographic Tradition* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1979), 33.

⁶⁶ Martin Luther, *The Creation: A Commentary on the First Five Chapters of the Book of Genesis*, trans. Henry Cole (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1858. Orig. Wittenberg: 1544), 450-51. John Calvin, *A Commentary on Genesis*, trans. John King, Geneva Series (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965; Orig. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847. Original Latin edition, 1554), 1:336, 2:36, 404-405.

⁶⁷ Karl H. Dannenfeldt, "Some Observations of Luther on Ancient Pre-Greek History," *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte* 42, no. 1-2 (1951), 52.

⁶⁸ James Ussher, *The Annals of the World*, ed. Larry Pierce and Marion Pierce, rev. and updated ed. (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2003 Orig. *Annales Veteris et Novi Testamenti: English*, London, J. Crook and G. Bedell, 1658).

⁶⁹ Barr, "Why the World Was Created in 4004 B.C.," 590-95.

earliest. While we can say that these writers did not question the idea of unusually long lifespans among ancient ancestors, they also believed there was an overall scheme to demonstrate the superiority of their culture or the glory of God. And the overall scheme often took precedence over the age or lifespan numbers.

The major finding of this survey, however, is that the emergence of chronological speculations only occurred ca. 300 BC. Finegan says, “Beginning in the late third, second and first centuries BC, Jewish (and Samaritan) scholars, living in the Hellenistic and Roman world (and in Palestine) undertook chronographical and chronical studies.”⁷⁰ Prior to that, there simply is no evidence of any ancient writings—including the Bible—calculating a chronology of the world. The biblical text records the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah as face value numbers,⁷¹ as does the Assyrian Eponym Canon,⁷² but symbolic numbers dominate Israel’s historical records prior to that, as they do with other ancient writings.

My Proposed Solution

Evangelical scholars believe Genesis conveys factual and historically accurate information about people and events in the patriarchal age. In this view, the divine author oversaw the contribution of the human author in such a way as to ensure an accurate portrayal of the events in antiquity. But, if we abandon the face value interpretation of the patriarchal lifespans are we not simply appropriating the findings and assumptions of the critical scholars?

The answer is no. A symbolic interpretation of the patriarchal lifespans from an evangelical point of view holds that these schematic numbers were part of the original composition of Genesis by Moses after the Exodus. They were not a numeric scheme added much later by the P editor(s). Even though we accept the work of a divine author supervising the composition of the Torah, there is an acknowledgment that Moses likely used sources. There is also an acknowledgment that Moses would have communicated using the language, idioms, worldviews, and presuppositions of his day, not of our day. A symbolic understanding of the patriarchal lifespans supports the antiquity of their origin, and it allows them to speak in the idiom of their day.

⁷⁰ Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 140. See also Ben Zion Wacholder, “Biblical Chronology in the Hellenistic World Chronicles,” *Harvard Theological Review* 61 (1968), 251. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, Septuagint: Collected Essays*, vol. 3, *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, ed. Christl M. Maier, vol. 167 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 238.

⁷¹ Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, new rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

⁷² Alan Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire 910–612 BC*, *State Archives of Assyria Studies*, ed. Robert M. Whiting, vol. 2 (Helsinki, Finland: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1994), 4.

My contention is that these patriarchal lifespans were originally written as schematic numbers intended to memorialize and convey honor to the lives of real ancestors who played significant roles in the founding of the nation Israel. I believe that a better understanding of how ancient cultures recorded lifespans will not only lead to a more accurate biblical interpretation, but also align the patriarchal narrative with the chronology of the patriarchal age and known archaeology from the Middle Bronze Age. This interpretation can restore faith in the historicity of the patriarchal narratives by removing the conflict between the face value interpretation and the historical evidence.

So, we have returned to the question of the best response to this conflict between science and Scripture. The concordist view fails because the patriarchal lifespans are not in concord with the historical evidence, and they were never intended to be. The accommodationist view accepts that the divine author accommodated a pre-scientific worldview of the biblical authors when Scripture was written.

Some accommodationists are comfortable with God tolerating error or myth in the Scriptures. However, the patriarchal lifespans are in error only if the original author intended them to be accurate historical records, and the original audience accepted them as such. This study has found that premise to be unsustainable. The writings from the third and second millennia BC contain exaggerated lifespans that everybody understood were intended to honor their ancestors. The lifespans in Genesis seem to be using the same principle. There was no intention to deceive in these Scriptures. Our responsibility is to understand them in the way the author(s) intended.

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