

How old was Adam?

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(Page numbers mentioned refer to the above book)

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ABSTRACT

In the first two papers of this series, I developed the following propositions: Adam was not the first human, and he lived in Sumer, Southern Mesopotamia, in the period 3200 - 3000 BC. In this paper I use those conclusions to place the early chapters of Genesis in their Sumerian context and I propose that the original written record of Adam was a Sumerian document where the ages that appear in Genesis 5 were recorded in a numbering system of that time, and this led to translation errors that result in the problematic ages of the patriarchs. I then propose a means of reverse-engineering the ages to the correct numbers when these events were first recorded in Sumer. The conclusion is that Adam was 81 years old when he died.

INTRODUCTION

As identified in the previous paper, a literal acceptance of the numbers in Genesis 5 leads to irreconcilable problems (in the Masoretic and the Septuagint texts) including: people living to almost one thousand years, the derived date for the Flood not matching any geological dates for such a flood, young men becoming parents at one fourteenth of their lifespan. Today, if a male becomes a parent in their twenties, it is one quarter or one fifth of their lifespan.

If we assume that Adam lived in Sumer, Southern Mesopotamia, around 3200 - 3000 BC, then we know what level of writing was possible and we know the state of the numbering systems. This provides a context for understanding Genesis. A careful reading of the genealogies in Genesis reveals two very interesting features:

- The similarities with the Sumerian King List.
- The unusual feature of the last digit of the ages in Genesis 5.

These two observations are key issues supporting the revision of the ages stated in Genesis.

Similarities with the Sumerian King List (SKL)

*After the kingship descended from heaven the kingship was in Eridug, at Eridug
Alulim became king he ruled 28,800 years
Alaġar ruled 36,000 years
Two kings they ruled 64,800 years*

*Eridug was overthrown the kingship to Badtibira passed, at Badtibira
Enmenluana ruled 43,200 years
Enmengalana ruled 28,800 years
Dumuzid the shepherd ruled 36,000 years
Three kings they ruled 108,000 years*

*Badtibira was overthrown the kingship was established at Larak, at Larak
Ensipadzidana ruled 28,800 years
One king he ruled 28,800 years*

*Larak was overthrown the kingship passed to Sippar, At Sippar
Enmendurana was king; and ruled for 21,000 years
One king he ruled 21,000 years*

*Sippar was overthrown the kingship was established at Šuruppag, at Šuruppag
 UbaraTutu was king he ruled 18,600 years
 one king he ruled 18,600 years*

Five cities, eight kings, they ruled 385,200 years
 Then the flood swept over.*

(* the length of the reigns in the 5 dynasties add up to 241,200 years but the text does say “385,200 years”.

The pre-Flood portion of the SKL has few words and follows a simple and repeated pattern throughout the whole document. The style is consistent with the state of literature at the time of the Flood around 2900 BC. This was when writing was transitioning from pictograms to a proto-cuneiform text.

Genesis 1 has a similar style. Each day begins with the phrase ‘And God said’ and each day ends with slight variations of ‘And there was evening and there was morning, a third day’.

Genesis 5 (Septuagint) follows a simple repetitive pattern, e.g. Genesis 5:6-8:

- 6 *Now Seth lived 205 years, and begot Enos.*
- 7 *And Seth lived after his begetting Enos, 707 years, and he begot sons and daughters.*
- 8 *And all the days of Seth were 912 years, and he died.*

Genesis 11 uses a similar style to list the generations from Shem to Terah.

The existence of the SKL demonstrates the presence of writing in the time of the Flood, hence in Noah’s lifetime. The style of chapters 1, 5 and 11 reflects the short, simple, and repetitive style of the SKL. This suggests that it was quite possible that the events of Genesis 1-9 (Adam to Noah) were a written history. It is not necessary to assume these events were passed on as oral tradition, because writing was sufficiently advanced in Sumer for those events to have been written and maintained in the temples of Sumer.

Another similarity between Genesis and the SKL is the trend in the numbers (longevity and the length of the reigns). As *Table 1* shows, they start of extremely large, followed by a transition period where they gradually reduce and end up with a long period where the number reflect what would be considered normal today.

Trend	SKL			The Bible		
	When	No. Kings	Ave. Reign	When	No. Gen	Ave. Gen
Impossibly large	Before the Flood	8	31,500	Adam to Noah	9	182.4
Transitioning down	1 st Dynasty of Kish to 3 rd Dynasty of Kish	63*	379.3	Shem to Jacob	12	124.2
Acceptable numbers	Akshak Dynasty to 4 th Uruk Dynasty	28*	16.4	David to Jesus (Luke’s genealogy)	42	25.2

Table 1 - Comparison of the reigns and the SKL to the generations in the Bible

NOTE (*) Many of the dynasties were overlapping, so multiplying the number of kings by the average reign will not provide a correct elapsed time.

The trend in the SKL is for impossibly long lengths for the reigns before the flood. Followed by a period of approximately 500 years when the length of the reigns reduced from 1,200 to 25 years. By the end of the 3rd Millennium BC the reigns were similar to modern times.

The same trend appears in Genesis, but with smaller numbers. Initially the average age for having the first-mentioned child was 182.4. After the Flood this slowly declined to an average of 124.4 by the time of Jacob

(and Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born). In Luke's gospel there are 42 generation from David to Jesus, over a period of 1060 years, with an average of 25.2 years per generation.

The similar trend in the numbers strongly suggests that the first writing of the early chapters of Genesis occurred in the same place and around the same time as the SKL was written for the first time, i.e. commencing in Sumer around 2900 BC.

The last digits

Table 2 shows the ten generations from Adam to Noah in Genesis 5, as they appear in the Septuagint text. The Septuagint is my preferred text for studying the numbers, for two reasons:

1. Is it the older text, being translated from a Hebrew text shortly after 283 BC, while the Masoretic text was an edited version of the Hebrew text between the 7th and 10th Century AD.
2. The numbers, in the Septuagint, are a better reflection of reality when comparing the age of becoming a father to the whole lifespan.

Gener- ation	Name	Parenting Age	Rest of life	Total life
1	Adam	230	700	930
2	Seth	205	707	912
3	Enosh	190	715	905
4	Kenan	170	740	910
5	Mahalalel	165	730	895
6	Jared	162	800	962
7	Enoch	165	200	365
8	Methusaleh	167	802	969
9	Lamech	188	565	753
10	Noah	502	448	950

Table 2 - Genesis 5 Ages, in the Septuagint

Table 3 shows the frequency of the last digit of the 'Parenting Age' (column 3) and the 'Rest of life' (column 4). The last column is not tallied because they are the sum of the numbers in the 3rd and 4th columns, and therefore not independent.

Last Digit	Frequency
0	8
2	3
5	5
7	2
8	2

Table 3 - The frequency of the last digit

There are a few interesting aspects to this data:

- The only digits present are 0, 2, 5, 7 and 8. The chance of only these five digits, out of the ten possible digits, occurring in the last place for twenty numbers is about one in one million (0.5 to the power of 20). This suggests that there is some reason that the other digits do not appear.
- The 2, 5 and 7 represent one-quarter, two-quarters, and three-quarters expressed in tenths and rounded down. This suggests that the list originally had the ages in quarters and were changed when written using a numbering system that used tenths.
- The two 8's only appear at the end of the list, in the ages for Lamech and Noah, suggesting that the data may have been compiled during Noah's life, or shortly after, when the scribe actually knew the more exact ages. It may also be that the eights are three-quarters rounded up.

The period from 3000 - 2500 BC was a time of great advancements in Sumer. Writing was evolving from Pictographs to proto-cuneiform and finally cuneiform. Numbering systems were evolving from simple systems to count grain and goods to partial-sexagesimal and ultimately sexagesimal systems, the language was changing from Sumerian to Akkadian. As these changes took place Sumer's written history had to be translated and updated.

The similarities with the SKL and the early chapters of Genesis combined with the nature of the last digit, together support the proposition that the events from Adam to Noah occurred in Sumer and were recorded on clay tablets by scribes of that era. And furthermore, the observation regarding the last digits has led the author Robert Best² (p. 107) to propose an explanation of how temple scribes in the middle of the 3rd Millennium BC misinterpreted the numbers and created those problematic ages.

A POSSIBLE SOLUTION

The SKL Numbers

The lengths of the reigns, in *Table 4* (5th column) are so extreme that it is easy to dismiss them as fantasy. But if there is a good explanation for how this happened and a correction that is believable then it must have some merit.

Figure 1 shows the two symbols from the time of Noah that represent 'year' and 'month'. In Genesis 7:11 Noah's age is given in years, months, and days. *Figure 2* shows the number symbols for 3,600 and 600 as they were after 2600 BC.

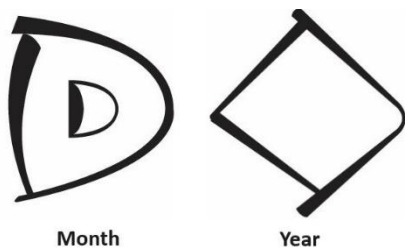


Figure 1 - Calendar symbols in Noah's time

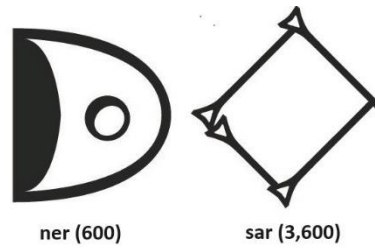


Figure 2 - Number symbols after 2600 BC

In *Table 4*:

- Column 2 lists the proposed lengths of the reigns when first written, around the time of the Flood, using the symbols in *Figure 1*.
- Column 3 shows how those symbols were interpreted when the list was rewritten 300 or 400 years later.
- Column 4 shows what these number meant in Hindu-Arabic notation.
- Column 5 shows how these reigns are currently interpreted.

King	Possible original	Misread Number	Meaning	SKL Reigns
Alulim	8 years	8 sars	$8 * 3,600$	28,800
Alagar	10 years	10 sars	$10 * 3,600$	36,000
Enmenluan	12 years	12 sars	$12 * 3,600$	43,200
Enmengala	8 years	8 sars	$8 * 3,600$	28,800
Dummuzid	10 years	10 sars	$10 * 3,600$	36,000
Ensipadzid	8 years	8 sars	$8 * 3,600$	28,800
Enmeduran	5 years 5	5 sars 5	$5 * 3,600 + 5 *$	21,000
Ubara Tutu	5 years 1	5 sars 1 ner	$5 * 3,600 + 1 *$	18,600

Table 4 - Revised reigns for the pre-Flood SKL

If the numbers in the SKL prior to the Flood have been misinterpreted when translated by Sumerian scribes then perhaps the same occurred when the record from Adam to Noah was updated to be in Akkadian rather than Sumerian and to use numbering systems current at the time.

The ages in Genesis 5

THE EARLIEST NUMBERS

To explain how the wrong ages came about in Genesis I will use Seth because his last digits are non-zero, and then I will come back to Adam. According to the Septuagint, Seth became the father of Enosh at age 205, lived for another 707 years and died at the age of 912 years. I will show that it is quite possible that the original text said that Seth became a father when he was $20\frac{1}{2}$, lived another $58\frac{3}{4}$ years, and died at the age of $79\frac{1}{4}$.

THE NUMBERS IN NOAH'S TIME (2900 BC)

In Sumer, from the middle of the Fourth Millennium BC until the time of Noah, improved agriculture created a society that traded extensively with nearby countries. But effective trading required the development of sophisticated numbering and measuring systems.

Initially, local regions developed their own numbering systems based on the type of commodity they traded. There were *different* measuring systems for milk, beer, oil, barley, wheat, wine and so on. The city of Uruk was known to have twelve different systems for measurements. Across Sumer, the *gur* soon became a standard for measuring volume and was defined as the weight a donkey could carry. Naturally, this measurement varied depending on the type of goods, but each city and trade worked out their own locally standardised quantities and vessel sizes around this measurement.

Robert Best (p113)² states that, at the time of Noah's Flood, the city-state of Shuruppak, the home of the Mesopotamian Flood hero, used the following measuring system. It was known as 'SHE GUR MAH' and in it there were eight *barigs* to the gur:

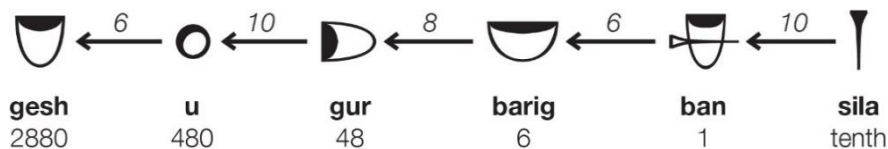


Figure 3 - A Shuruppak numbering system around the time of Noah

- The *sila* was the size of a serving bowl on the table (a bit less than a litre)
- The *ban* was ten *sila* and was the size of a small vessel, convenient for use in the home (about nine litres).
- The *barig* was 6 *ban* and was a convenient size for a person to carry.
- The *gur* was 8 *barig*, or 48 *ban*, and was a load that could be carried by a donkey.
- The *u* was 10 *gur* or 480 *ban*.
- The *gesh* was 6 *u* or 2880 *ban*.

From city to city, the major variation was around the number of *barigs* in each *gur*. This varied from four to eight, resulting in different number systems evolving—and the resultant confusion when interpreting numbers from that time.

Take Seth as our example. If we assume that he lived 79 and 1/4 years, a scribe in Shuruppak around the time of Noah, using a numbering system that had tenths would write the number as 79 and 2-tenths, as follows:



Figure 4 - Seth's lifespan of 79 and 2 tenths as written in Noah's time

To a reader in Shuruppak it would be interpreted as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Seth's total life} &= 1 \text{ gur} + 5 \text{ barig} + 1 \text{ ban} + 2 \text{ sila} \\
 &= 1(48) + 5(6) + 1(1) + 2 \text{ (tenths)} \\
 &= 48 + 30 + 1 + 0.2 \\
 &= 79.2 \text{ years}
 \end{aligned}$$

Table 5 shows the three ages for Seth as they may have been written in 2900 BC:

PERIOD	SHURUPPAK SYMBOLS	CORRECT INTERPRETATION	AGE
Parenting Age		$3(6) + 2(1) + 5(1/10)$	20.5
Rest of Life		$1(48) + 1(6) + 4(1) + 7(1/10)$	58.7
Total Life		$1(48) + 5(6) + 1(1) + 2(1/10)$	79.2

Table 5 - Original ages for Seth (proposed)

THE RECORD IN THE MIDDLE OF THE 3RD MILLENNIUM

After the Flood, the city of Shuruppak declined in power and was eventually uninhabited. As a result, the knowledge of their numbering systems was lost. Between 2600 BC and 2500 BC, Sumer was undergoing major changes and the following partial sexagesimal system had become the standard (see *Figure 5*) *Best (p114)*.



Figure 5 - The partial sexagesimal numbering system

If scribes of this time were not fully aware of the full range of numbering systems in Sumer over the previous 400 years, then the numbers on documents in temple archives could easily be mistranslated. The symbol for 'six' (one *barig*) in Noah's time was similar to the symbol for 'sixty' in 2500 BC. If a scribe assumed that the symbol originally meaning 'six' was meaning 'sixty' and the other symbols were similarly misinterpreted, then one tenth becomes 1, 1 becomes 10, and 6 becomes 600, as shown in *Figures 3 and 5*, and the ages for Seth were incorrectly transposed as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Parenting age (20.5 years)} &= 3 \text{ barig} + 2 \text{ ban} + 5 \text{ sila} && \text{(proposed)} \\
 &= 3 \times 60 + 2 \times 10 + 5 \times 1 && \text{(interpreted)} \\
 &= 180 + 20 + 5 \\
 &= 205 \text{ years}
 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Rest of life (58.7 years)} &= 1 \text{ gur} + 1 \text{ barig} + 4 \text{ ban} + 7 \text{ sila} && \text{(proposed)} \\
 &= 1 \times 600 + 1 \times 60 + 4 \times 10 + 7 \times 1 && \text{(interpreted)} \\
 &= 600 + 60 + 40 + 7 \\
 &= 707 \text{ years}
 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{Total life (79.2 years)} &= 1 \text{ gur} + 5 \text{ barig} + 1 \text{ ban} + 2 \text{ sila} \quad (\text{proposed}) \\
&= 1 * 600 + 5 * 60 + 1 * 10 + 2 * 1 \quad (\text{interpreted}) \\
&= 600 + 300 + 10 + 2 \\
&= 912 \text{ years}
\end{aligned}$$

So, if you start with the ages $20\frac{1}{2}$, $58\frac{3}{4}$ and $79\frac{1}{4}$ for Seth and translate them as if they were partial-sexagesimal numbers you obtain the numbers that appear in Genesis 5. So now we can reverse-engineer Adams age. If we start with 930, as in the Masoretic and Septuagint texts, and reverse the process his age become 81 years.

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{Adam's lifespan} &= 48 \quad + 30 \quad + 3 \quad (81 \text{ years}) \\
&= 1 \text{ gur} + 5 \text{ barig} + 3 \text{ ban} \quad (\text{as in 2900 BC}) \\
&= 1 * 600 + 5 * 60 + 3 * 10 \quad (\text{misinterpreted}) \\
&= 600 + 300 + 30 \\
&= 930 \text{ years}
\end{aligned}$$

Table 6 shows the revised ages and the original Septuagint ages from Adam to Noah.

Name	Septuagint ages			Revised ages			Lifespan	
	First child	Rest of life	Total life	First child	Rest of Life	Total life	Born BC	Died BC
Adam	230	700	930	23.0	58.0	81.0	3113	3032
Seth	205	707	912	20.5	58.7	79.2	3090	3011
Enosh	190	715	905	19.0	59.5	78.5	3069	2991
Kenan	170	740	910	17.0	62.0	79.0	3050	2971
Mahalalel	165	730	895	16.5	61.0	77.5	3033	2956
Jared	162	800	962	16.3	68.0	84.2	3017	2933
Enoch	165	200	365	16.5	20.0	36.5	3001	2964
Methusaleh	167	802	969	16.8	68.3	84.9	2984	2899
Lamech	188	565	753	18.8	44.5	63.3	2967	2904
Noah	600	350	950	23.0	60.0	83.0	2948	2865

Table 6 - Revised ages and chronology

NOTES:

1. The 'Rest of life' of 44.5 years, for Lamech, is derived by subtracting his 'First child' number from the 'Rest of life' number.
2. Genesis states that Noah was 600 when the Flood occurred. But as *Figures 3 and 5* show, the correct age for Noah at this time is more likely to have been 48 years. Then, because he had three married sons by the time of the Flood, the assumption is made that he was 23.0 years when his first child was born.
3. The Genesis age of 950 for Noah is revised to 83.0 years. Therefore, it must be 60.0 years for the rest of his life.

If Adam's birth was approximately 3113 BC and he lived for 81 years, then this places him in the period proposed (3200 - 3000 BC) in the 2nd paper in this series. The placing of Adam in that period has some interesting consequences:

- Adam was alive at the time when kingship 'descended from heaven' and Sumer had human rulers or kings.
- Adam's life coincides with Adapa, the first great sage who was created to advise these kings and to teach the arts and writing to humankind.
- Adam was alive at the time when writing was available to priests and educated people.

- Adam lived in the early stages of the Bronze Age, when improved technology brought great wealth through improvements in agriculture and led to extensive trade within and outside Sumer. This increased wealth resulted in greater status for the cities—and the temples within those cities.

For many Christians, the idea of abandoning the apparent longevity in Genesis may appear to be a rejection of the teaching of the Bible and a failure to accept the Bible as authoritative. This is emphatically not the case. It is worthwhile considering the words of Psalm 90:9 “Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty if our strength endures.” This verse is from the Song of Moses and is one of three prayers or songs of Moses in the Bible. (The others are Exodus 15:1-18 and Deuteronomy 32:1-43.) According to the words of Moses, we may live to be eighty if we have a healthy body. If the revision of the ages were to stand alone, then the argument would be weaker, but the supporting evidence from the SKL and the Song of Moses *strengthens* the argument that the longevity of Genesis was much the same as it is now, and it is due to translation errors that Moses wrote that Adam lived to be 930.

CONCLUSION

The pre-Flood portion of the SKL uses simple statements to present a list of kings. While the list of names and places may be believed the lengths of the reigns are not believable. However, the fact that every reign is a combination of multiples of 3,600 and 600, makes it easy to demonstrate how the misinterpretation may have occurred. When reverse-engineered the resulting reigns return to numbers consistent with human lifespans. From beginning to the end of the whole SKL there are three sections: the pre-Flood with lengthy number, the middle section showing a reduction in the numbers, and the final section showing reigns consistent with human lifespans.

The same thing happens in the Bible: the simple writing style of early Sumer in Genesis 1, 5, and 11; the pattern of reducing lifespans and longevity in Genesis 5 that can be reverse-engineered to produce normal human lifespans.

Therefore, I propose that Adam lived in the period 3200 - 3000 BC and that he probably lived to be 81 years old. This means that Adam lived at a time when the priests of Sumer were an elite class of people. Intelligent, well-educated, and highly trained, the priests developed both writing and mathematics – knowledge essential to manage their increasingly sophisticated society. This knowledge helps establish the social, cultural and, most importantly, the religious context for Adam and leads to a different understanding of Genesis 1-5.

If this revised chronology does prove to be acceptable, then the propositions of the first two papers (that Adam was not the first human and that he lived 3200 - 3000 BC becomes a more certain proposition. If the best explanation for the longevity in Genesis 5 is that they are the result of a misinterpretation of a numbering system from Shuruppak around 290 BC, then the record from Adam to Noah must be a Mesopotamian text written at that time. If that is the case, then the argument for the story being passed on as oral history is redundant. When a culture has a written record there is no need for oral history.

References

1. <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/ancient/266-the-sumerian-king-list/>
2. Best, Robert M. *Noah's Ark: And the Ziusudra Epic*. Florida: Enlil Press, 1999. Print

The papers in this series may be located at <https://www.tomcroucher.com.au/qanda>
