

The Bible Vindicated! - 3

Last time we saw how Voltaire declared that he had discovered a glaring contradiction between chapters 11 and 12 of Genesis, concerning the age of Abram. While chapter 12 says that Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran for Canaan, Genesis 11:26 says that “Terah lived seventy years, and begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran.”

Voltaire did the math and concluded that Abram was 135 years old when his father died - subtracting the age of Terah 70 at the birth of Abram from the age of Terah 205 at his death results in Abram being 135 at his father’s death, not 75 - a 60 years discrepancy.

We also noted that the Jews understood Haran to be born first, and like other instances in the Old Testament, e.g., Genesis 34, 49:8, the primogeniture had been reassigned to Abram. This is consistent with that fact that it was this son of Terah that God chose to be progenitor of his chosen nation Israel.

And so Voltaire’s mistake was assuming that Abram was born first because his name is mentioned first in Genesis 11:26. In fact, then, all the necessary information is given in Genesis 11:32 which says that Terah died in Haran - and 12:4 which says that after the death of his father, when Abram was 75, he left Haran for Canaan - “Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.” This shows that Abram was born when Terah was 130 - ($205 - 75 = 130$), which was 60 years after the birth of Terah’s oldest son Haran ($130 - 70 = 60$) when Terah was 70.

Another of Voltaire’s complaints - “It is equally difficult to explain satisfactorily how it was that Sarah, the wife of Abraham, was also his sister” -

“Abraham says positively to Abimelech, king of Gerar, who had taken Sarah to himself on account of her great beauty, at the age of ninety, when she was pregnant of Isaac: ‘And yet indeed she is my sister, she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife’.”

According to Flavius Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, the Jews understood Genesis 11:29 as saying that Abram and Nahor, the younger sons of Terah, married their nieces, the daughters of their oldest brother Haran - “Then Abram and Nahor took wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and the father of Iscah.” The Jews identified Iscah with Sarai.

The 60 year spread among the births of Terah’s sons explains how the marriages were possible between one generation of Terah’s descendants and a later generation of his family -

- ◆ In Genesis 11:29 Terah’s 2nd son Nahor marries one of Terah’s granddaughters, Milcah;
- ◆ Terah’s youngest son Abram marries Sarai, whose father (or grandfather), reports Genesis 20:12, was Terah, but who had a different mother (or grandmother) than Abram’s mother. These events suggest that Nahor was closer in age to Abram than to Haran;
- ◆ In Genesis 24:24, 67 Terah’s grandson Isaac marries Terah’s great-granddaughter Rebekah.
- ◆ In Genesis 29:23, 28 Terah’s great grandson Jacob marries Terah’s great-great-granddaughters Leah and Rachel.