

ANDREW E. STEINMANN'S SEARCH FOR CHRONOLOGICAL GAPS IN GENESIS 5 AND 11: A REJOINDER

JEREMY SEXTON

Abstract: Steinmann needed to show that the chronogenealogical formula throughout Genesis 5 and 11 (“When A had lived X years, he brought forth [יָוִיֶּלֶד] B”) indicates not when B was born but rather when A performed the causing action that initiated the process that culminated in B’s birth. His reply, however, does not even attempt to establish this bedrock premise; he continues to treat it as self-evident. My rejoinder demonstrates that Steinmann has not successfully defended the semantics of causation that underlies his unique case for chronological gaps.

Key words: Genesis 5 and 11, chronogenealogical formula, hiphil of יָוִיֶּלֶד, causative, temporal qualifier

I. STEINMANN DOES NOT BEAR HIS BURDEN

The recurring chronogenealogical formula throughout Genesis 5 and 11 is “When A had lived X years, he brought forth [יָוִיֶּלֶד] B.” The causative יָוִיֶּלֶד is a *hiphil* form of יָלַד “to give birth to.” I have demonstrated that genealogical gaps do not entail chronological gaps, because even if A is not B’s immediate father, the temporal qualifier “when A had lived X years” that modifies יָוִיֶּלֶד still indicates how old ancestor A was when descendant B was born. The burden that Steinmann needed to bear is great. He needed to show that the temporal qualifier “when A had lived X years” indicates *not* how old A was when B was born but rather how old A was when he performed the triggering act that initiated the process (perhaps a millennia-long process) that culminated in B’s birth. Steinmann builds his argument for chronological gaps on this unprecedented semantic premise, one that allows him to insert as much time between A’s triggering act (the causing action) and B’s birth (the caused event) as the extrabiblical evidence requires.

The burden is great not only because Steinmann is the first to propose this particular approach to Genesis 5 and 11 but also because linguists and Hebraists agree that a causative (such as the *hiphil* of יָלַד) describes the caused event, not the causing action, and that a causative’s temporal qualifier thus refers to the time of the caused event, not to the time of the causing action. Consider this comment from OT scholar Victor P. Hamilton, author of the article on יָלַד in *NIDOTTE* and the commentary on Genesis in *NICOT*:

I have recently read your paper on “Evangelicalism’s Search for Chronological Gaps,” including your interaction with Steinmann throughout your article. It seems to me that you have an irrefutable case against his understanding of the

Hiphil. I fail to see how he can sustain his argument that the Hiphil of *yalad* [יָלַד] refers to the ancestor's causing action. It refers to the caused event, B's birth. I agree with you that the temporal qualifier "when A had lived X years" indicates the time of the caused event.¹

Nevertheless, Steinmann devotes no portion of his reply to adducing support for his idiosyncratic position that the temporal qualifier "when A had lived X years" indicates the time of the causing action (A's triggering act) rather than the time of the caused event (B's birth). The one point Steinmann needed to prove, he does not even argue for. He continues to treat it as self-evident that the semantic focus of a causative and its temporal qualifier is on the causing action, without addressing the linguistic evidence, arguments, and consensus I have presented to the contrary.²

II. STEINMANN FOCUSES ON TWO IRRELEVANT POINTS

Steinmann dedicates section III (nearly 80% of his reply) to proving two points denied by no one: (a) that the scope of a causative necessarily includes both a causing action and a caused event and (b) that the causing action and the caused event are often separated in time. I affirm both of these points in my article. They do not establish what Steinmann needs to prove: that the causing action (A's triggering act) rather than the caused event (B's birth) occurred when A was X years old. In the final paragraph of section III, Steinmann summarizes his argument. Notice how points (a) and (b) above serve as the premises for his conclusion (emphasis his):

As we have seen, for causal verbs both cause and resulting action are necessary, and there is no causation without both [point (a)]. This is precisely why gaps can be a possibility in the genealogies. The causing action and the resulting action need not be simultaneous and can in fact be separated by a long period of time (as in the case of Hezekiah) [point (b)]. *Thus, all we know is that the trigger action took place when Kenan was 70 years old. We have no information to tell us when the result—the birth of Mahalalel—took place.*

The conclusion "the trigger action took place when Kenan was 70 years old" does not follow from (a) and (b). Steinmann needs the following additional premise to make his argument valid: "When the trigger (causing) action and the resulting

¹ Hamilton has graciously supported my 2015 *WTJ* article and now my main *JETS* article, both on Genesis 5 and 11, even though in his 1990 commentary on Genesis (*The Book of Genesis* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 1:254) he briefly defended the chronological gaps that Green first posited and that Steinmann is now defending.

² Steinmann assumes that the semantic focus of יָלַד in the *biphil* and *bophal* (i.e. in the H-stem) is on the progenitor's causing action rather than the progeny's birth. Consider the impossibility of reconciling this assumption with Gen 40:20; Ezek 16:4, 5. In each of these three verses, the H-stem of יָלַד focuses on "the day" of *birth*. Ezekiel 16:4, 5 refer to "the day on which *you were brought forth* [H-stem of יָלַד]." The temporal qualifier "the day on which" refers to the time of the progeny's birth, not the time of the progenitor's causing action.

(caused) event are separated in time, the temporal qualifier refers to the time of the trigger action rather than the time of the resulting event.” Nowhere does Steinmann defend this hidden semantic assumption, one for which I am unable to find another proponent. I point the reader to my 2015 *WTJ* article and especially my main article in this issue of *JETS*, where I provide evidence from the Hebrew Bible and cite Hebraists and linguists in defense of the conventional view that a causative describes the caused event and, as a corollary to this, that a causative's temporal qualifier refers to the time of the caused event.

III. STEINMANN ALTERS HIS FORMULATION (AGAIN)

Steinmann: “[Sexton] claim[s] that I have written things that I did not write, implied things that I have not implied.” I claim that Steinmann holds that a causative denotes the causing action rather than the caused event, to which he objects, “That is quite simply nonsense and not at all what I think or state. ... There are *two acts*, and this causative verb [הַכְשִׁילָתָם in Mal 2:8] refers to both of them, not one rather than the other” (emphasis his). He says that a causative “will have *two* verbal notions denoted: the trigger action and the result” (emphasis his). This idea, that a causative denotes two acts, both the causing action and the caused event, has not always been his position. In his personal correspondence with me and then in his 2017 *BSac* article, Steinmann wrote that a causative only refers to one act, the causing action rather than the caused event; he stated specifically and emphatically that the H-stem (i.e. the *hiphil* and *hophal*) of יָלַד denotes the progenitor's triggering act (the causing action) rather than the progeny's birth (the caused event). Here are examples of what he repeatedly wrote to me (emphasis his):

Let us turn to [the H-stem of] יָלַד. It *is not* about birth (or begottenness). ... Birth is always involved somewhere *but that is not what the verb is about*. Birth is a logical, not semantic, requirement.

The H stem of this verb [יָלַד] denotes the initiating of a process that brings forth something sometime in the future. It does not denote the begetting [i.e. the birth/bringing forth] itself but the initiating of the process that leads to the birth/bringing forth.

[יָלַד] in the H stem entails a birth. ... It also entails the existence of a mother or mothers, but that doesn't tell us anything (other than that there was a mother or mothers). ... The point is not what concepts are entailed—which is a logical conclusion—but what is *denoted* or what is the *focus* of the verb in the H stem.

There is no focus on the eventual birth with the H stem of יָלַד. The eventual birth is only a logical connection.

Examples abound.

Steinmann puts forward this same view in his 2017 *BSac* article, in which he only ever affirms that the *hiphil* of יָלַד denotes the ancestor's causing action, never suggesting that it also refers to the resulting birth event. Only one statement in that article affirms that the *hiphil* of יָלַד refers to the resulting birth event: it is a quote from my *WTJ* article, “The *hiphil* of יָלַד describes the birth of its grammatical ob-

ject,” which Steinmann singles out for critique, stating that “[Sexton] misunderstands the grammatical relationship of causative verbs and their direct objects” (p. 146). His point is that an active causative (the *hiphil* of הִפְּיל in particular) describes the event involving the subject (the causing action) rather than the event involving the direct object (the caused event).³ Now, in his reply, he says that it describes both.

Asserting that a causative denotes two events takes Steinmann far afield of both his original argument and his burden. It adds another unprecedented semantic assumption to his endeavor to revise the traditional notions of causation. But this ad hoc adjustment does not help his case. After all, Steinmann still maintains that a causative’s temporal qualifier only refers to the time of one of the two events (particularly if they are separated temporally). As much as ever, then, he must show that a causative’s temporal qualifier refers to the time of the causing action rather than the time of the caused event.

In my main article (see section I.3.c.: “*Steinmann’s different semantics in 2014*”) I note another time Steinmann altered his formulation. In his reply to this (see section II of his reply) Steinmann insists that he has always held the view (formulated in his 2017 *BSac* article) that the genealogies give the age of ancestor A at the time of his causing action. But he does not explain his conflicting 2014 statement. Here it is again: “These genealogies list the age of each ancestor [A] at the birth of his descendant [B].”

IV. STEINMANN MISUNDERSTANDS LINGUISTS AND LINGUISTICS

Linguist Leonard Talmy says that causing actions are not “specified” (denoted) in causatives but “implied.” I repeat Talmy’s point in my main article, sometimes saying “merely implied” for emphasis. On the basis of my use of the word “merely,” Steinmann determines that “[Sexton] misconstrues Talmy’s statement.” But Steinmann does not show how I misconstrue Talmy. He concludes, “When Talmy says that the causing action is implied, he means that a specific cause is not identified in the causative.” Yet that is also precisely what I mean. Having corresponded with both Talmy and Dixon about the section in which I cite them, I am confident that I construe each of them accurately.

Dixon pointed me to his *Basic Linguistic Theory*, volume 3, chapter 24.⁴ Two points from Dixon’s chapter pertain to Steinmann’s reply. First, Dixon says on p. 243 that in a two-verb causative such as “cause to die” or “make to eat,” “the verbs function together as one predicate and are conceived of as describing a single action.” This nullifies Steinmann’s new assumption that a causative describes two

³ He explains further, “The temporal nexus between subject and verb is immediate. However, the temporal nexus between verb and direct object—especially for causative verbs—need not be immediate.” Here Steinmann identifies the action described by an active causative with the action of the subject (the causing action) rather than with the action involving the direct object (the caused event).

⁴ Robert M. W. Dixon, *Basic Linguistic Theory*, vol. 3: *Further Grammatical Topics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

actions. If a two-verb causative only describes one event, surely a one-verb causative (such as the H-stem of **לָדַד**) does not somehow describe two events. Second, Dixon says on p. 241 that a causative's notion of causation (conveyed by the affix **ה** in H-stem verbs) is "a secondary concept." Steinmann needs the notion of causation to be primary, not secondary. He needs the generic affix **ה** in H-stem verbs to be the semantic focus. For his chronological gaps to work, the verbal root to which **ה** is attached (i.e. **לָדַד**) must be secondary, not the semantic focus, not what the causative is about.

V. STEINMANN MISUSES THE WORD "EXPLICIT"

Steinmann enlists the word "explicit" to combat my "merely implied." He attempts to maintain that a causative explicitly expresses and, in another sense, does not explicitly express a causing action. This only results in awkward and apparently contradictory formulations, as this example illustrates: "The explicit expression of the trigger action points to a specific action that is not explicitly expressed in the verb itself." One finds it difficult to understand how a causative explicitly expresses the trigger action but does not explicitly express a specific action.

VI. STEINMANN MAKES ERRONEOUS CLAIMS

Steinmann: "Sexton never references the standard Hebrew grammars concerning causation." Both my 2015 *WTJ* article and my main *JETS* article cite Waltke-O'Connor's *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* on the semantics of the H-stem. My *WTJ* article cites it on the H-stem of **לָדַד** in particular. Section III.1 of my *JETS* article uses it to rebut Steinmann's semantics of causation. My *JETS* article also cites the article "Causative Verb: Biblical Hebrew" in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* multiple times.

Steinmann: "Sexton does not systematically engage my discussion of 2 Kgs 20:18/Isa 39:10 [*sic*]." My 2015 *WTJ* article deals systematically with Steinmann's interpretation of 2 Kgs 20:18 // Isa 39:7. In fact, the section of that article titled "Second Kings 20:18 // Isaiah 39:7" interacts with personal correspondence from an unnamed OT scholar, who is Steinmann. In his 2017 *BSac* article, Steinmann reasserted the unprecedented interpretation of 2 Kgs 20:18 // Isa 39:7 that he had put forth in his correspondence with me, but without engaging my published analysis of it or addressing the many problems with it.

VII. STEINMANN DOES NOT MAKE HIS CASE WITH HIS KEY ENGLISH EXAMPLE

Steinmann uses the sentence "On July 2, 1881, Charles Guiteau shot James Garfield twice, causing him to die on September 19, 1881" to establish the incontrovertible point that the causing action can be separated in time from the caused event. But his discussion of this example contains three deficiencies.

(1) Steinmann equates “kill” and “cause to die.” The sentence “Charles Guiteau killed James Garfield” eventually becomes the example above. But Dixon notes,

In the 1960s it was suggested that, for instance, *kill* can be derived from *cause to die*. Fodor (1970) presented a number of arguments against this analysis, e.g. one can say *John caused Bill to die on Sunday by stabbing him on Saturday* but not **John killed Bill on Sunday by stabbing him on Saturday*. This is because *cause* has a rather special meaning, referring to indirect causation which can involve a time lapse.⁵

So one can say “Guiteau caused Garfield to die on September 19, 1881, by shooting him on July 2, 1881” but not “Guiteau killed Garfield on September 19, 1881, by shooting him on July 2, 1881.” The periphrastic causative “caused to die” adequately communicates the time lapse between the causing action and the caused event; the lexical causative “killed” does not. One should not imagine, then, that the conceptual difficulties posed by “killed” (when temporal qualifiers are added) are also posed by “caused to die.” It is impossible to date “Guiteau killed Garfield” to one day. But it is quite natural to date “Guiteau caused Garfield to die” to one day; indeed, Steinmann’s own example rightly dates it to “September 19, 1881,” the day of the caused event.

(2) Steinmann assumes that the periphrastic causative “causing ... to die” in his example describes two actions, both Guiteau’s shooting and Garfield’s death. As we saw above, though, the two verbs of this causative “function together as one predicate and are conceived of as describing a single action” (Dixon).

(3) Steinmann’s example contains two clauses and two temporal qualifiers. Modifying it to make it analogous to the chronogenealogical formula, which contains one clause and one temporal qualifier, we find that “Guiteau caused Garfield to die on September 19, 1881” (the day of the caused event) is historically accurate, while “Guiteau caused Garfield to die on July 2, 1881” (the day of the causing action) is not. Steinmann’s example concurs. This confirms that the semantic focus of a causative is on the caused event. The historically accurate clause above describes and dates the caused event. It neither describes nor dates the implied causing action.

To bring clarity both to this point and to the larger discussion, we might ask, “When did Guiteau’s shooting cause Garfield to die?” A discerning doctor who somehow knew early on that Garfield was going to die would not have said, “Guiteau’s shooting *has caused* Garfield to die.” He would have said, “Guiteau’s shooting *will cause* Garfield to die.” Semantically, a causing action does its causing at the time of the caused event.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Despite downplaying the importance of extrabiblical data to his argument, Steinmann applies the words “suspect,” “tendentious,” “incorrect,” and “obscu-

⁵ See n. 61 in my main article. In linguistic literature, asterisks mark ungrammatical forms.

rantist” to the chronological interpretation on the basis of our “greater knowledge of [extrabiblical] ancient near Eastern chronology.” If Steinmann continues to insist that external evidence precludes an intact timeline in Genesis 5 and 11, he is duty-bound to construct a plausible exegetical argument that, with integrity, allows for chronological gaps. So far, in his novel semantics of causation, he has failed to find such an argument.