

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

IT MUST be an everlasting source of regret to all lovers of the Bible that Professor Umberto Cassuto died before he was able to complete his *magnum opus*, the Commentary on the Pentateuch. In the words of Bialik: 'The song of his life was cut off in the middle . . . And lo! the hymn is lost for ever!'

But even the 'unfinished symphony' shows all the qualities of the master. He illumines every passage of the Bible that he annotates. With profound insight he reveals the inner meaning of Scriptural teaching against the background of history. He enables us to see the fascinating process of the evolution of ideas in the ancient world; and he sets the Biblical contribution to the progress of our conception of God and His providence, of the mystery and wonders of creation, of the unfoldment of the moral law within the human heart, in their true perspective. In doing all this, Prof. Cassuto, we are conscious, not only uncovers some of the noblest foundations of modern civilization, but he orients our minds anew to Hebraic ideals, which have their roots in antiquity, but the golden fruit of whose unending yield has much to offer Jew and Gentile alike in solving the contemporary crisis, fraught with so much danger to mankind as a whole, and in helping to formulate the constitution of the brave new world envisioned by the prophets.

Cassuto brought a wealth of scholarship to bear on his work. His almost unrivalled knowledge of ancient Semitic literature, his authoritative understanding of all branches of Biblical inquiry, and his outstanding critical acumen marked him as one of the great Bible exegetes of our age. Endowed with a mind of unusual originality, he pioneered novel scientific methods of interpretation that amounted to a new approach to some of the major exegetical problems of the Book of books, and enabled him to batter the

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foundations on which the Graf-Wellhausen school rested their documentary theories and expositions. Cassuto's strictures in regard to one particular point of interpretation (p. 190) aptly summarize his criticism of the prevailing expository method as a whole. "This method, he writes, 'which establishes a given principle *a priori*, without taking into consideration what is expressly stated in the text, and then, placing the passage upon the Procrustean bed of that principle, hacks off the textual limbs that do not fit into the bed, can hardly be accepted as valid.'

It is true that Cassuto had precursors, and that inevitably his own theories were subjected to thorough-going criticism. Nevertheless, if today the documentary hypothesis is seriously challenged, no small measure of tribute for this revolt against the unwarranted 'vivisection' of the Bible on the basis of flimsy analysis is due to Cassuto, who met the Higher Critics with a panoply of scholarly apparatus that fully matched their own.

In view of the intrinsic value of our author's distinguished contribution to the elucidation of the Torah, one cannot but wish that his writings were known to a far wider public. The pellucid clarity of his exposition and the purity of his classic Hebrew style made his Pentateuchal commentaries immediate best sellers in Israel. But outside the Jewish State, only the higher echelons of Bible scholars were able to read his Hebrew works. To the ordinary student of Scripture — both Jewish and non-Jewish — his writings remained a sealed book, and his very name is unknown outside a limited circle of students.

It was, therefore, with a sense of unfeigned privilege that I accepted the invitation to render the Cassuto commentaries into English. I am convinced that the general reader as well as the scholar will welcome the opportunity of becoming acquainted with the illuminating results of this great exegete's researches. I can but humbly hope that the translation will not obscure the many excellencies of the original.

From the outset I realized that I was at a great disadvantage in not being able to consult the author on various questions inherent in turning a work of this character from one language into another. One example must suffice to illustrate a host of analagous problems:

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in the course of his annotations, Cassuto often buttresses his argument with references to Biblical passages that are themselves in certain details the subject of exegetical controversy. The Hebrew quotation carries no commitment in respect of its obscurity; but the English translation must of necessity decide in matters that do not always admit of simple solutions. I was often without any guide as to the way in which our author would have expounded the verses he cites.

Generally, however, I followed the rendering of *The Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament* as the basis of my Biblical translation, deviating from it whenever required by Cassuto's interpretation. It will thus be noted that, as in *The Revised Standard Version*, I have dispensed with the use of *thou* and *thee* (except in reference to the Deity), and I have avoided other archaic expressions found in the older English versions.

With regard to the principles that guided me in the work of translation as a whole, I may perhaps be permitted to cite Maimonides' advice to Samuel Ibn Tibbon, when the latter undertook to translate his *Guide for the Perplexed*:

Let me premise one canon. Whoever wishes to translate, and purposes to render each word literally, and at the same time to adhere slavishly to the order of the words and sentences in the original, will meet with much difficulty. This is not the right method. The translator should first try to grasp the sense of the subject thoroughly, and then state the theme with perfect clearness in the other language. This, however, cannot be done without changing the order of the words, putting many words for one word, or *vice versa*, so that the subject be perfectly intelligible in the language into which he translates.

To this I would add Samuel Johnson's dictum:

He will deserve the highest praise who can give a representation at once faithful and pleasing, who can convey the same thoughts with the same graces, and who, when he translates, changes nothing but the language.

Such was my aim. I endeavoured to keep the translation as true

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to the Hebrew as the requirements of idiomatic English usage (including punctuation) would permit. * But alas! —

Between the idea
And the reality . . .
Falls the shadow.

Doubtless I have lived up to the familiar adage that 'translators are traitors', and I have betrayed the author here and there by failing to convey some nuance or emphasis. My only plea in self-exculpation is that the betrayal was committed unwittingly.

Cassuto was not only a meticulous scholar but, as a perfectionist, he also demanded the highest standards from his printers. Nevertheless it is difficult, if not impossible, to keep the printer's gremlin completely under control. I have corrected such typographical errors and wrong references as I noticed, and I have indicated the Hebrew as well as the English number of every verse where these differ in the two versions. The nature of the work also made it necessary for me to add an occasional gloss, or to give the meaning of a Semitic root or word that had to be retained in its original language. These explanatory notes are enclosed in square brackets.

In order to assist the reader who has little or no knowledge of Semitic languages, it was decided to give, in addition to the original, the transliteration of all Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic words quoted; but the Sumerian, Babylonian and Ugaritic words, being in cuneiform in the original, always appear in transcription only. Long vowels in the Hebrew are uniformly indicated by a horizontal line over the vowel; the circumflex accent (^), which is often used to mark essentially long vowels (either naturally so or by contraction), has, for the sake of simplicity, been dispensed with. In the case of Assyrian and Babylonian words, however, it was deemed advisable to retain this symbol. The key to the transliteration will be found at the end of this Foreword.

It should also be noted that in the case of Ugaritic citations, and at times when the roots of other tongues are referred to, the con-

* This rule has been broken in the translation of Genesis v, where the numbers follow the Hebrew order contrary to the normal English idiom. The purpose of this deviation is to indicate the ascending and descending order of the numerals; see the commentary on v 3.

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sonants alone are represented in the transcription; vowels are provided only in those instances where Cassuto has indicated these himself. Likewise the Tetragrammaton is always transcribed without vowels, thus: *YHWH*. For Biblical names (including the books of the Bible) and rabbinic works and authorities, the customary spelling, even though not strictly scientific, has been retained.

Considerable use has been made of italics. These indicate not only words emphasized by the author but also all passages quoted from the Bible. In addition the following two symbols have been employed: the end of each Scriptural text to be annotated is marked by] ; but if the quotation is immediately followed by square brackets, a slanting stroke (/) is placed between them and the subsequent comment. This stroke is also used to indicate the caesura in the Biblical lines.

I would conclude with a brief, but deepfelt, word of thanks to all who helped me in various ways to carry out my work of translation, and enabled it to be published in its present form.

First, I desire to convey my gratitude to Mr. Silas S. Perry, after whom the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research in the Hebrew University is named, for his unfailing encouragement, invaluable suggestions, and consistent help in numerous directions; were it not for his generous idealism and friendship this translation would never have seen the light of day.

My warm thanks are tendered to Professor Isaac L. Seeligmann for his gracious assistance in solving a number of problems. Lack of adequate library facilities in South Africa compelled me to submit to him a whole series of queries (involving, *inter alia*, the tracing of a number of references), to which he replied with painstaking care characteristic of his fine scholarship. His courtesy and counsel to one who was a complete stranger to him will always remain with me a fragrant memory.

I am likewise indebted to Dr. Milka Cassuto-Salzman, the daughter of the author, for her valuable assistance. Apart from reading the proofs and preparing the indexes with exemplary skill and patience, she also rendered a great service to the undertaking by many helpful suggestions and was instrumental in assuring the accuracy of the rendering at various points.

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My grateful thanks are also due to a number of experts who put their special knowledge at my disposal: to Dr. M. Spitzer for repeated guidance in typographical matters, which conduced to the aesthetic appearance of the work; to Dr. S. E. Loewenstamm for his erudite advice on questions appertaining to Ugaritic literature; and to the Central Printing Press for the conscientious and meticulous manner in which they carried out their task.

Finally, my thanks go out to the Hebrew University for bestowing its imprimatur on the translation and arranging for it to be printed by the Magnes Press, an honour of which I am deeply conscious and for which I am truly grateful. I am especially indebted to Professor B. Mazar, the President of the University, for the personal interest he has taken in the enterprise. It was in no small measure due to his understanding of the permanent significance of Cassuto's Commentaries for our knowledge of Scripture that this translation came to fruition. In helping to make this monumental work of Biblical scholarship and exegesis available to a far wider circle of readers than the original could have reached, the Hebrew University is putting the world once again in its debt by deepening our knowledge of the Torah and by spreading its moral and spiritual truths to the ends of the earth.

ISRAEL ABRAHAMS

Cape Town.
January, 1959.
Tebeth, 5719.

KEY TO THE TRANSLITERATION

HEBREW

(a) CONSONANTS

א = '	ל = l
{ ב = b	מ, מ = m
{ כ = bh	נ, נ = n
{ ג = g	ס = s
{ ד = gh	ע = '
{ ד = d	{ פ = p
{ ד = dh	{ פ, פ = ph
ה = h	צ = ç
ו = w	ק = q
ז = z	ר = r
ח = ħ	ש = ś
ט = ṭ	ש = š
י = y	{ ת = t
{ ק, ק = k	{ ת = th
{ ק, ק = kh	

- Note: (1) Unsounded ה at the end of a word is not represented in the transcription;
- (2) the customary English spelling is retained for Biblical names and rabbinic works and authorities.

(b) VOWELS

<i>Long</i>	=	<i>Short</i>	=
ָ (Qāmeṣ gādhōl)	=	ַ	= a
ִ (Hīreq gādhōl)	=	ֵ	= e
ֵ	=	ִ (Hīreq qātān)	= i
ֹ	=	ָ (Qāmeṣ qātān)	= o
ֻ	=	ֶ	= u
׃ (Šewāʿ)	=		
ֿ:	=	ֿ	= ä
׃:	=	׃	= ö
׃:	=	׃	= ë

Note: Capital E represents ׀, ׀, and ׀:; thus ׀לֵהיִם is transliterated 'Elōhīm, and ׀ל is transcribed El.

ARABIC AND OTHER LANGUAGES

The method commonly used in scientific works was followed in the transliteration of Arabic, Akkadian, Egyptian and Ugaritic words.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ABBREVIATIONS

I REFER to the commentaries on the Book of Genesis only by the author's name (e.g., Dillmann, Gunkel, Jacob). Below I list the works (almost all periodicals) that I cite by their initial letters. More obvious abbreviations — for instance, *Ephemeris*, *Jew. Enc.* and the like — are not given here.

- AJSL* American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature
AJO Archiv für Orientforschung
ARW Archiv für Religionswissenschaft
BASOR Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BJPES Bulletin of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society
 [Hebrew]
BZ Biblische Zeitschrift
BZAW Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
GGN Nachrichten von der k. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften
 . . . zu Göttingen
HTbR Harvard Theological Review
GSAI Giornale della Società Asiatica Italiana
HUCA Hebrew Union College Annual
JAOS Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL Journal of Biblical Literature
JPOS Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society
JRAS Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
MdW Masoreten des Westens, Stuttgart 1927–1930
 Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums
NRTb Nouvelle revue théologique
RB Revue Biblique
Rech.Sc.Rel. Recherches de science religieuse
RHPbR Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses
SMSR Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni
ZA Zeitschrift für Assyriologie
ZAW Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZDMG Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft

[BDB F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament . . .* based on the Lexicon of W. Gesenius
Gesenius–Kautzsch² Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar* as edited and enlarged by the late E. Kautzsch, Second English Edition]

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

J	=	Jahwist	S	=	Seir
E	=	Elohist	P	=	Priestly Code
E.V.	=	English Version of the O.T.			

PREFACE

THE AIM of this commentary is to explain, with the help of an historico-philological method of interpretation, the simple meaning of the Biblical text, and to arrive, as nearly as possible, at the sense that the words of the Torah were intended to have for the reader at the time when they were written. Although the homiletical method is, without doubt, of great importance, in as much as it interprets the Bible in every generation according to the spirit and needs of the age, nevertheless every verse has its primary signification, and Scripture merits our effort to fathom its original intent.

The lines along which I have worked will become self-apparent to the reader as he studies the book; there is no need, therefore, for me to go into detail here. I shall draw attention only to a few basic principles by which I have been guided throughout.

The first chapters of the Book of Genesis, which form the subject of this commentary, deal with topics about which — and their like — there were numerous sagas in the ancient East, both among the Israelites and among the Gentiles. Hence, it is not possible to understand the purpose of the Torah in these chapters without constant reference to the lore and learning, the doctrines and traditions, of the neighbouring peoples, and of Israel itself, concerning these and related matters. For this reason, I paid greater attention than earlier commentators to the literature of the nations of the ancient East and to all the archaeological data that might possibly throw light on the subject — in all, a vast and variegated body of material, which, thanks to a number of fortunate discoveries, has, in recent years, grown considerably. Moreover, I gave consideration not only to the parallels between Israel and the other peoples, but also to the divergences between them; for the differences are likewise instructive, perhaps even more so than the similarities.

In order to determine the content of the traditions that were

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current among the *Israelites*, and their origin and development, I sought to gather and examine the scattered references in the other books of the Bible to the subjects under discussion; and since even the Apocrypha and Rabbinic Literature, though written at a later date, incorporate ancient elements capable of shedding light on the Israelite traditions that were extant in the earliest period, I made use of them, too, in my researches.

I investigated the history and principles of the *literary tradition* with no less care than the development of the *thematic tradition*. For to gain an exact understanding of a Biblical passage it is very important to observe the way in which literary expression is given to the thought. In this respect, too, I found it invaluable to compare the writings of the neighbouring nations, and more particularly those of the Canaanites (see my Hebrew essay, 'Biblical and Canaanite Literature', in *Tarbiz*, xiii, pp. 197–212 and xiv, pp. 1–10). I have attempted to establish the detailed rules followed by the Bible in its use of particular syntactical forms, rhetorical style, repetitions with certain modifications, synonymous and antithetic parallelism, as well as the laws governing the structure of verses, paragraphs and sections; at no time, however, did I lose sight of the fact that the peoples of the ancient East did not think along the same lines, or express themselves in the same manner, as the European races. I also made every effort to note accurately all the linguistic details of the text, its grammatical niceties, its allusions, even its play upon words; and this thoroughgoing study was of great help to me in determining the precise meaning of Scripture.

The study of the history of the traditional themes is bound up with the study of the *sources*. I have given a general exposition of my views concerning the sources of the Book of Genesis in my Italian treatise, *La Questione della Genesi*, (Florence, 1934), pp. 393–398, and in the Hebrew abridgement thereof, called תורת התקדוּת וְסִדּוּרָם שֶׁל סִפְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה *Tōrath Hattē'ūdhōth W'esiddūrām Šel Šiphrē Hattōrā* [*The Documentary Hypothesis and Composition of the Pentateuch*], Jerusalem, 1942 (English translation, Jerusalem, 1961, pp. 101 ff.). Anyone who has studied these volumes will know that, in my opinion, the sources are very different from the documents J (Jahwist), E (Elohist), P (Priestly Code), postulated by the commonly-held theory. In the present work, I proceed to give a detailed

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example of a comprehensive commentary based on my view of the original documents.

Seeing that this is the first commentary ever written on these sections of the Pentateuch in accordance with the principles that I have outlined above and in the light of my aforementioned views on the question of the sources, it follows that my exposition is, in its entirety, completely new and original. I have taken constant care, however, to avoid any hypotheses that are not well-founded. I have endeavoured throughout not to forsake the firm basis of the facts; I did not bend the Bible to make it fit in with my theories, but rather fitted my theories to the Biblical text.

Needless to say, I consulted such earlier commentaries as were available to me, as well as all the scientific works bearing on the subject; I have also appended to each section a detailed bibliography. But since it was not my wish to make the commentary, which in any case had assumed no inconsiderable proportions, longer than was necessary, and as, moreover, it was not my intention to enter into polemics but simply to give what appeared to me to be the correct exposition of the text, I refrained, as a rule, from citing the interpretations of other exegetes; only if warranted by exceptional reasons, did I refer, in the briefest terms, to the explanations of other expositors. I was invariably careful, however, to quote the author of any statement that was not my own; but should my book, by chance, be found to contain any observation that is also made by another commentator, without his name being indicated, it signifies (unless I have been guilty of an oversight) that I had already made this point in a previous book or article, and that I am to be regarded as the originator thereof, even though the other annotator failed to mention my name.

In the bibliographies appended before each section, I have not included the works already listed in my Italian treatise mentioned above, but I have started from the year of its publication (1934). The earlier bibliographical references are available in my Italian work; where this is not to hand, bibliographical guidance on preceding literature will be found in the books and articles published during the last decade, which I mention in this volume. *

When I began my scientific researches on the Book of Genesis eighteen years ago, I approached my task without any bias, and I

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was prepared, from the start, to accept all the results of my investigations, be they what they might. I adopted a similar attitude when I began my work on the present commentary; I was willing to accept the conclusion, if necessary, that what I had myself previously written was erroneous. It was not my object to defend any particular viewpoint or any particular exegetical method, but only to arrive at a thorough understanding of the Torah's meaning, whatever that might be.

Possibly this attitude will not be acceptable to those who hold, from the outset, that certain views are not open to doubt. There are those, on the one hand, who are accustomed to read the Scriptures in the light of homiletical interpretation and think it wrong to deviate from the explanations that they received from their teachers and from the approach to which they have become used since childhood; and, on the other hand, there are those who see in the documentary hypothesis an assured and enduring achievement of science, an impregnable structure. I would ask both these schools of thought not to be hasty and pass judgment on my book before they have read it completely and have examined what it states in detail. I venture to hope that in the end even though they may not agree with me on all points — full agreement, of course, is not to be expected — they will both concede at least the correctness of my method and of most of my conclusions. The one group, which is well acquainted with the rabbinic dictum that every verse retains its simple meaning, must admit that the sincere endeavour to comprehend the words of the Torah according to their primary sense, and to fathom the ultimate purport of Scripture, cannot be regarded as something contrary to the spirit of the Bible itself. The other group, which is well aware that science has no dogmas, must grant that there is no scientific theory, however much it may be favoured, which is entitled to permanent acceptance and may not be criticised or replaced by another theory. On the contrary, the investigator is not only permitted, but is obliged, to submit the earlier theories to constant re-examination, and if it appears to him that the view that was formerly considered correct does not correspond to the established facts or to the new data discovered by science, it is his duty to abandon it and attempt to put forward, in its stead, another hypothesis that will better fit the existing facts and the new data.

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The commentary I present here on the first chapters of Genesis, which belong to the difficult and obscure portions of the Pentateuch, will serve, in a way, as a touchstone for my method. I trust that it will stand the test.

It is my pleasant duty to express my thanks to Dr. J. L. Magnes, the Director of the Hebrew University Press Association, and to his fellow-members of the Editorial Board, for kindly including this book in the Association's series of publications. I am also grateful to the various libraries in which I worked on the preparation of my commentary, to wit, the National and University Library, the library of the Government Department of Antiquities, the library of the American School of Oriental Research, the library of the Dominican School of Bible and Archaeology, the Schocken Library, and the library of the Museum of Jewish Antiquities; I am indebted to the directors and staff of these institutions for their courteous assistance. Finally, my thanks are due to the printers, Raphael Hayyim Ha-Cohen and Sons, who always endeavoured to fulfil my every request and to give me the utmost satisfaction with their work.

JERUSALEM, ELUL, 5704 (1944)

U. C.

* No attempt has been made to bring the bibliographies up to date, since it is felt that this is a task that only the author, had he lived, could properly have performed (*Translator*).

GENESIS V 5-11

6. *Five years and a hundred years*] — comprising 1,200 months plus another 60 months.

Enosh] Regarding this name, see above, on iv 26.

7. *And Seth lived, etc.*] Compare the expression — somewhat different in form, but similar in meaning — in *v. 4*.

Seven years and eight hundred years] — the basic number of 800 years with the addition of *seven* years.

8. *Twelve years and nine hundred years*] To the fundamental number of 900 years there has been added here a unit of five years (60 months), as well as a unit of *seven* years.

THIRD PARAGRAPH

ENOSH

9. *And Enosh lived / ninety years,
and begot Kenan.*

10. *And Enosh lived / after he begot Kenan
fifteen years / and eight hundred years,
and begot sons and daughters.*

11. *Thus all the days of Enosh were / five years / and nine
hundred years;
and he died.*

9. *Ninety years*] 6+6+6 units of 60 months.

Kenan] With reference to this name, see above, on iv 1.

10. *Fifteen years and eight hundred years*] The basic figure of 800 years has been augmented here by three units of 60 months.

11. *Five years and nine hundred years*] To the fundamental number of 900 years there is added here a unit of 60 months.

FOURTH PARAGRAPH

KENAN

12. *And Kenan lived / seventy years,
and begot Mahalalel.*

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13. *And Kenan lived / after he begot Mahalalel
forty years / and eight hundred years,
and begot sons and daughters.*
14. *Thus all the days of Kenan were / ten years / and nine
hundred years;
and he died.*

12. *Seventy years*] — the well-known round number: ten times seven; or: twice times seven units of 60 months.

Mahalalel] — a distinctly Hebrew name: מַהֲלַל־אֵל *Mahälal-'El* ['Praise of God'] (it is also found in Nehemiah xi 4). Among the sages of the Mishnah occurs the name Akabya son of Mahalalel.

13. *Forty years and eight hundred years*] To the basic age of 800 years have been added 360+120 months.

14. *Ten years and nine hundred years*] The fundamental number of 900 years has been augmented by 120 months.

FIFTH PARAGRAPH

MAHALALEL

15. *And Mahalalel lived / five years and sixty years,
and begot Jared.*
16. *And Mahalalel lived / after he begot Jared
thirty years / and eight hundred years,
and begot sons and daughters.*
17. *Thus all the days of Mahalalel were / five and ninety years /
and eight hundred years;
and he died.*

15. *Five years and sixty years*] — that is, 60 years and 60 months.

Jared] — in Akkadian (*w*)*ardu*, 'a slave' (Albright in *JBL*, lviii [1939], p. 17, note 9 a).

16. *Thirty years and eight hundred years*] — the fundamental age of 800 years plus 6 units of 60 months.

17. *Five and ninety years and eight hundred years*] — the basic number of 900 years, which, as I have stated, equals 60+60+60 units of 60 months, less one unit.