

Chronology, Part 1

When you study history in school, you're forced to memorize a thousand dates for events you don't understand, don't remember, and *really* don't care about. History CAN be one of the most fascinating subjects; but it is *usually* one of the most boring because it is taught without *context*.

Most people hate the books of Kings and Chronicles almost as much as the "...and he begat..." parts of the Bible. This is a shame because some of the best parts of the Bible are found in the stories of the kings and the various prophets and people who interacted with them.

But in order to understand those kings you need to get a big picture of the Bible; you need to grasp the the Bible as a single, continuous story, and know where each person and event fits into that story. When you understand that, you will find history fascinating – because EVERYTHING is history.

Everything that isn't happening right NOW is a part of history. And ALL of those things brought us here, today, and helped shape who and what we are; and if you don't understand even ONE of those pieces, that's a piece of yourself that you will never understand.

Most people never bother to study the chronology of the Bible, figuring it doesn't really matter; but chronology is not about knowing the exact date that the temple was constructed; chronology is about building a framework within which you can fit the milestones of history. It's about constructing a rough outline that you can hang people, ideas, and events upon; and having done so, understand their relationship to each other better. And that's....

LESSON 54: CHRONOLOGY

Overall, chronology is a very simple subject. In principle it's just a matter of starting in Genesis and adding up all the verses like "and he lived 35 years and begat..." and sooner or later you work your way up to today.

Unfortunately it really isn't that simple, for several reasons. For one, there are missing pieces of time in the Bible that are not clearly accounted for; for another, there are several apparent contradictions that give people reasons to argue about the dates. This is why no two chronologies published agree.

Before we get started, there are a few things you should know: everyone who ever wrote anything on the subject is wrong. The most widely accepted dates are the ones compiled by Bishop Ussher, an Irish Protestant bishop, in the 17th century. Almost everyone agrees these dates are wrong, but that they are decent approximations; this is true, they are decent *approximations* – *give or take 50 years in some cases*.

But you can do better than that. So when you fill out the test for this lesson, if you put the dates you copy out of your Bible's margin, or a commentary on the Bible, you will automatically get a failing grade.

Also, think about the terms "BC/AD". They mean, respectively, "Before Christ" and "Anno Domini", which is Latin for "Year of our Lord". This isn't accurate, because you will learn Christ was *not* born in year zero (and almost all scholars agree on this). Jesus was in fact born several years BC, which means Jesus was literally born "several years Before Christ" (according to our calendar). Which is an amusing irony. However, it's the accepted dating system, and we cannot change that just because it's silly.

That said, the modern world wants to be politically correct, and Jews, Muslims, Atheists and others are offended by "BC/AD" since using them tacitly accepts the existence of Christ, so they have created new terms to replace them, "BCE/CE". These signify "Before Common Era" and "Common Era", respectively.

While these terms are somewhat more accurate, since as noted above BC/AD are not based on Jesus' birth anyway, I personally refuse to be politically correct simply to pacify those who hate God, so I continue to use BC/AD. It's a matter of principle.

For right now, we aren't going to worry much about BC/AD, we're going to use a different system called FC. It stands for "From Creation", and it uses the Bible's own internal chronology system. In other words, when you add up a group of dates in the Bible you'll arrive at, say, 1948 FC – that means 1948 years after God created Adam. We will worry about how many years BC that was later; this will keep things simpler for now.

GETTING STARTED

There are two completely independent ways of establishing the *exact* date of Adam's creation, as well as every other major event in the Bible. One is simple math, and the other is by understanding the Bible's symbolism. We're going to start with the simple math, and save the symbolism for the next lesson.

This lesson will be different than most lessons because your test will not just be a question/answer/essay test, but a graphic test. You are going to make your own chronology chart, not only as a test, but for your own reference. This will not be too hard and will be a lot of fun, and is *required*.

You can do it several different ways, but I recommend that you start with four pieces of regular notebook paper, with the short sides taped together so it's really long but rather narrow. You'll need all this space for the 7000 years you're going to put on them.

(If you tend to write large, have problems seeing, etc., you may need to double the amount of paper – make it 2 sheets by 8 sheets, or use posterboard – it doesn't matter, just do what works for you.)

You're going to be drawing short lines horizontally on these pages to represent how long each person lived. When they have a child, you will draw a very short vertical line and then another horizontal line to represent the child's life.

So lay your sheets sideways on a table and with a ruler and pencil, draw a line about a half-inch below the top of the pages, and another a half-inch above the bottom. Do this all the way across all the sheets.

Then divide the pages into 7 boxes. Each box will represent 1,000 years. At the top of each vertical line between boxes, mark “0 years FC”, 1000 years FC”, etc.

It will make your job a lot easier later if you can use the lines on the notebook paper to represent smaller time periods, such as 10, 50 or 100 years per line. It’s also great if you can make 1 inch equal 100, 200 years – something like that.

But do it however you like – just remember you’ll need to quickly make approximations about how long your “lifelines” need to be. It doesn’t have to be exact – but the better job you do, the more useful it will be later. If you happen to be good with computers and prefer to do this digitally, that is even better.

ADAM TO NOAH

So for your first man, lay your sheets sideways (they’ll stay like this) and turn to **Genesis 5:1-4** and read what it says. Next you need to draw a horizontal line to represent Adam’s life, starting at the top left corner and stretching across most of the first block (about half a page, if you used 4 sheets) to represent 930 years. Above the line neatly write “Adam”. At the end of the line, write “930”.



Now according to **verse 3**, Adam had a son at 130; so where 130 should be on Adam’s lifeline, draw a short vertical line (perhaps 1/4" or less) and at the bottom of the line draw a line to the right to represent Seth’s 912 years (**verses 6-8**), and write Seth’s name above the line; put “130” on the left of the vertical line.

Repeat at Seth’s 105 year mark for Seth’s son Enos, and so on. Read the rest of the chapter (**verses 9-32**) and do this for each of the men there.

We are not interested in a family tree in this lesson; we aren’t trying to write down everyone in the Bible. Only the really important ones, and only the ones who help us to connect our chronology line. So you don’t need to draw Ham and Japheth – only Shem, for he is the only one we have age/death/children data on.

Now you need to know how old Noah was when the flood happened, because that is a significant event worth putting on your chart. For that turn to **Genesis 7:5-11**. Put a small vertical line on your chart at the proper age in Noah’s life to mark this significant event.

Now add up all of the ages up to the time of the flood (not to Noah’s *death* but to the age Noah was when the flood happened!) and see how many years after the creation of Adam the Flood came.

That means you add up, **not how old everyone was, but how old they were when they had their first child**. Then add Noah’s age at the flood and you have the date of the flood.

If you've done your math right and added up your lines correctly, you should have 1656. If not, go back and double check your work until you find your mistake. (That's the last date I'm just going to give you like that for awhile – so make sure you check your own work!)

ARPHAXAD

Most of the Bible's chronology is simple, like what you've just done. Most of it, everyone agrees on – no one disputes that it was 1656 years from Adam to the Flood. Most of the chronology is concentrated in a few chapters which you'll study over the next few pages and there is little disagreement about most of it. However, there are five critical points where nearly everyone disagrees.

Those points have apparently contradictory information which must be resolved *correctly* or else every other date you have will be wrong. If you argue with anyone about Chronology, these are the areas about which you will argue. The first one is Shem's son, Arphaxad.

According to **Genesis 11:10**, Arphaxad was born to Shem “two years after the flood”. But how long did the flood last? **Genesis 7:11-12**. Everyone knows that... right? **Verse 24**. But wait! **Genesis 8:4**. But wait! **Verses 5-6**. But... yeah, wait. **Verses 7-13**. Surely that's it! But then there's **verse 14**.

The world has this very simplistic view of a 40-day-40-night flood. And it was quite a bit more than that. Noah's family went into the ark the 17th day of the second month of his 600th year. And they didn't LEAVE the ark until the 27th day of the second month of his 601st year. That means they spent a year and ten days in the ark! (Which, perhaps coincidentally, is a true solar year.)

So back to the point, if Arphaxad's birth was measured from the beginning of the flood it would be a year earlier than if it was measured from after the flood! But the Bible always resolves its own contradictions; here, you can compare the phrase used in **Genesis 9:28-29**. Noah was 600 at the beginning of the flood. He died at the age of 950, 350 years “after the flood”.

This shows that the author of Genesis measured dates from the beginning of the flood, and thus that Arphaxad was born 2 years after the *beginning* of the flood – so write *that* on your chart by putting his birth line in the appropriate place.

THE SONS OF NOAH

There is another minor problem which doesn't affect the overall dates, but which does affect an argument we'll hear later about Abraham. When **Genesis 5:32** says that Noah was 500 years old and sired “Shem, Ham, and Japheth”, we are led to believe they were triplets; or, at the least, that Shem was the eldest. Yet the Bible makes it clear that isn't possible by using some simple math.

The flood began when Noah was 600 (**Genesis 7:6**). At that time, Shem would have been 100 years old, if born when Noah was 500. But if you read **Genesis 11:10**, you'll see that Shem's firstborn, Arphaxad, was born 2 years after the flood, *when Shem was 100 years old*.

See the problem? Shem was born when Noah was 500, the flood happened when Noah was 600, and Shem's son was born two years LATER when Noah was 602 ... **and at THAT point Shem was only 100!** There are two extra years there. Figuring backwards, we cannot escape the conclusion that Shem was born when Noah was 502. Yet **Genesis 5:32** clearly said Noah was 500 when he had “Shem, Ham, and Japheth”.

How can we reconcile this without breaking the unbreakable scripture? Simple! ALL the scriptures must be used. Read **Genesis 10:21**. Shem was the brother of Japheth – we knew that – but the brother of Japheth *WHO WAS THE ELDER!*

This means that the order given in **Genesis 5:32** is wrong. Not wrong exactly, because the order is given that way for a reason; but wrong, chronologically. See, the Bible has an interesting quirk in that the “eldest” child is often not the eldest in chronological age, but is the eldest reckoned by birthright. In other words, if the “real” firstborn child is an evil monster, the birthright will go to the next eldest; and from that point on, HE will always be given the honors that belong to the eldest.

Shem was mentioned first because Shem received the birthright, not Ham or Japheth, the elder. We know that Shem received the birthright because the line of Christ and the blessings of Abraham were given to HIS children, not to the others!

We don’t know exactly why Shem inherited the birthright in front of his brothers. Very little is said about any of the three. Regardless, they were listed as “Shem, Ham, and Japheth”, even though Shem was certainly younger than Japheth; the way it is listed implies that Ham was the firstborn; Japheth the second; Shem the last.

If that is so, then we can safely conclude that Ham was born when Noah was 500; Japheth when he was 501; and Shem when he was 502. And that **Genesis 5:32** meant that Noah was 500 years old when he *began* to have children, and had Shem, Ham, and Japheth – in order of birthright, or Ham, Japheth, and Shem, in order of birth.

TOWER OF BABEL

The only Biblical dating for the tower of Babel is in **Genesis 10:25**. Remember that Babel was built “lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (**Genesis 11:4**). God wanted man to be scattered abroad, and but mankind did not. So they built Babel. Then God destroyed Babel and scattered them upon the earth. Apparently, the scattering *after* Babel happened in the days of Peleg .

Peleg lived 239 years. This gives us a rather large window. **However, it likely happened early on in the life of Peleg, when he was still young enough to name!**

Also, Nimrod and Asshur built Babel and Nineveh, respectively – and Nimrod was the grandson of Ham, and Asshur was son of Shem. The second and first generations after the flood. Given this information, the destruction of Babel most likely happened in the first 100-200 years after the flood.

NOAH TO ABRAHAM

Genesis 10 is full of the nations of the Earth, but that’s genealogy, not chronology, so we aren’t interested in that. The next useful chapter to us is **Genesis 11:10-32**. Go ahead and put all of them into your chart, but don’t write Abraham in yet – we have to talk about him for awhile. You should be right about at the end of your second square by now.

Remember I said there are five problems with Chronology in the Bible. Two of them are in Abraham’s life. The first involves how old Terah was when Abraham was born. It seems obvious, right? Terah was 70 and he had Abram (Abraham), Nahor, and Haran. It is possible, but unlikely, that they were triplets, and probable, but not certain, that Abraham was the oldest – both conclusions based on our experience with Shem-Ham-Japheth.

All would be well if it wasn't for a statement of Stephen in **Acts 7:4**. Based on that verse, if we read it at face value, it says that Abraham left Haran after his father died. According to **Genesis 12:4**, Abraham was 75 years old at that time. Since Terah died at 205, and at that time *apparently* Abraham was 75, it would mean Abraham was born when Terah was 130, *not* 70! But don't write that down yet – we're not done!

As reasoning goes, it's fine, but reasoning like this is very dangerous. It isn't always wrong, in fact we just used this for Arphaxad a moment ago; but it CAN be wrong if you don't rigorously check EVERY assumption and answer EVERY problem. Arphaxad had none; this has several.

First, remember how Abraham was promised a son by God, and didn't believe it? **Genesis 17:15-17, 18:10-15**. They laughed at GOD that a man who was 99 years old would have a son! Would they REALLY have been so surprised at the very idea that “a man a hundred years old [could] have a child” *if Abraham HIMSELF had been born to Terah at 130 years of age??*

What's more, Sarah was Abraham's half-sister (**Genesis 20:12**), and she was ten years younger than he, which means she would have been born when Terah was 140! Even more, much later when Abraham sent his servant back to Terah's household for a wife for Isaac, his servant thought this was such an unusual event that it was worth mentioning (**Genesis 24:36**). Later, Joseph was born to Jacob at 91, and was loved *because “he was the son of his old age”* (**Genesis 37:3**).

Sarah said (to paraphrase) “no one would have believed that Abraham could have had children at *his* age” (**Genesis 21:7**). Paul was inspired to write that, at his age, Abraham's body should have been “*now dead*” as far as bearing children was concerned (**Romans 4:19-22**) – and says that normal men, in Abraham's place, would have “*staggered at the promise of God through unbelief*”!

And ALL of this strongly *implies that Isaac was born long after normal men had children!* Throughout the Bible people marveled at the miracle of Isaac's birth **which would be absurd if Abraham himself had been born to a man of 130!**

You'll notice from your chart that since the flood, the age at which the first child was born had dropped dramatically and was averaging about 35 years. No one knows why this is, myself included; but the fact is, the child-bearing years, like the overall lifespan, were plummeting. So for a man to have a child at 100 was *quite unusual*. This alone makes the 130-year-birth very improbable.

God apparently blessed Abraham once, and it lasted for the rest of his life, since he continued to have children well into his hundreds (**Genesis 25:1-8**), and died at what God considered “a good old age” for the time. But the Bible is all true, so how do we reconcile what Stephen said with what Genesis said?

CHALLENGE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

As I've said before, when you have a hard problem **challenge your assumptions!** Read **Acts 7:4** very, VERY carefully. What are you assuming when you read it? Put the lesson down, right now, look at the verse, and THINK about it!

Having read it carefully, word-for-word, does it REALLY say that Abraham left Haran when Terah was dead? Or does it only SEEM to say that? Try to separate what you are assuming from what it *actually* says!

It says when Terah was dead “he removed him into this land”. Is that saying that *ABRAHAM* moved *himself* into the Promised Land after the death of Terah? Or is that *an assumption* which practically everyone makes?

An assumption is not necessarily wrong; it is merely something taken for granted; other possibilities are being subconsciously ignored because you’re *assuming* you have the right answer already. Perhaps you do – but that’s an *assumption* again.

In this case, everyone assumes that the “he” and “him” in that verse *BOTH refer to Abraham*. But what if one or the other pronoun *doesn’t* refer to Abraham at all? What if it refers to *TERAH* instead? Terah is *ALSO* the context of the verse – in fact, Terah was the last person mentioned in the sentence!

So now we have identified our assumption; either one of these possibilities might be true. One way it would read “from Haran, after Terah died, Abraham removed himself into Canaan”. The other way, it would read “from Harah, after Terah died, Abraham removed *TERAH’S BODY* into Canaan”.

These are very different meanings, and to determine which one is correct, we have to look at the other scriptures; one of these readings disagrees with **Genesis 11:26** and **32**; that immediately makes us dislike it. But another thing to look at is the oddity of the expression “he removed him”.

Would you say “I used to live in Iowa, but when my father died *I removed myself* into California?” No, you’d use words like “I moved”, or “I left”; you wouldn’t even say “I moved myself”. Still, some might just barely argue that this could make sense in English. But this verse was written in Greek, and Greek is not so ambiguous.

Greek *has* words that mean “moved” and “left”, such as *metakinoi* and *aphiemi*. But those words were not used in **Acts 7:4**. Instead, Stephen used the word *metaikizo*, which means “**to transfer as a settler or CAPTIVE, i.e. colonize or exile:— CARRY AWAY, remove into**” (**Strong’s Greek Lexicon**).

The word he used means to transfer someone ELSE from one place to another – *not* that someone moves himself from one place to another! Compare it’s usage in **Acts 7:43**, where using the same word Stephen quotes God saying “I will CARRY you away [*metaikizo*] into Babylon” – this isn’t a voluntary transfer, it’s God transferring people *against their will*.

A nearly identical root word was used in **Matthew 1:11-12, 17**; each time to refer to people being **forcibly moved**. Using this word makes no sense if Abraham had moved HIMSELF! It only makes sense if after his father’s death, Abraham caused his father’s BONES to be moved to Israel.

Their bones being in the Promised Land was very important to the patriarchs; compare **Genesis 50:25**, **Exodus 13:19**, **Genesis 49:29-50:5**, **Genesis 23:1-20** and **Genesis 49:30-31**. So it is well within the bounds of plausibility that Abraham would have wanted his father’s bones interred in the Promised Land as well. But there is one last piece of evidence that makes everything fit.

Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old, as you’ll study in a moment. Isaac was a symbol of Christ (compare **Hebrews 11:17-19**, **John 3:16**, **Hebrews 13:20**, etc). He was also offered on Mt. Moriah, where Solomon would later built the temple of God (**Genesis 22:2**, **2 Chronicles 3:1**). And so as a symbol, it is logical that Isaac was offered at the same age as Jesus was offered – which as you’ll study later, was 34.

If that is the case, then the offering of Isaac in **Genesis 22** took place when Abraham was 134. In **Genesis 23:1** Sarah died at 127 years old, and she being ten years younger than Abraham, he was 137 at the time. Between these two events was a three year window.

Now supposing that **Genesis 11:26** and **32** is correct as it reads, and Abraham was born when Terah was 70, Abraham would have been 135 years old when Terah died. And so between the offering of Isaac (when Abraham was 134) and the death of Sarah (at 137), what do we find in scripture? **Genesis 22:20-24**.

“It was told Abraham...” By whom? Look at a map of Bible territories from the time of Genesis, and you will find Haran is roughly 500 miles north of where Abraham was then living near where Jerusalem would one day be. **A 500 mile journey across harsh terrain was not something you did for the fun of it in those days.**

There had to be a REASON for such a journey, in order to get news from so far away. And while there are a number of possible reasons, the death of Terah is suggested by the known facts; Abraham was 135 years old at this point in the Bible, just when Terah died! And the best possible justification for a messenger to be sent across 500 miles of rugged, dangerous terrain would be to inform Abraham, the eldest son (or at least, the birthright son), of the death of his father!

Naturally, the messenger also informed Abraham of all the other events that had happened in the 60 years since he had left Haran, and it was those facts which were written down in **Genesis 22:20-24**. This resolves ALL the problems; it makes **Genesis 11** true; and explains why Stephen used a word meaning “to carry away forcibly” when he said “he removed him” from Haran.

Based on all of this, we can only conclude that **Acts 7:4** should read “and from Haran, after Terah was dead, Abraham brought up his body into the land of Canaan”.

So on your chart, put down Abraham being born when Terah was 70; and living to be 175 years old. And when Abraham was 75 years old, he came into Canaan; write that on there as it is an important event.

ISHMAEL AND ISAAC

Next we have Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael’s birth will be important later, so we’re going to write it in as well, even though he isn’t part of the main line. Read **Genesis 15:1-4**. This was a promise of a son; actually, it was a promise that he would have Isaac, although he didn’t know it yet.

Abraham didn’t know how it could happen since Sarah was barren and old, so Sarah volunteered to use her maidservant as a surrogate mother. This wasn’t what God had meant – He had something more miraculous in mind – but it worked out (**Genesis 16:1-3**).

This is important because it helps us to date this event – this covenant God made with Abraham happened after he had dwelt in Canaan 10 years, thus, when he was 85. Write that down on your chart as “The covenant of faith”. Then read **Genesis 16:15-16** and **Genesis 25:17** and put Ishmael’s life on your chart. **Make sure you leave space to draw Isaac in later.**

Then read **Genesis 17:1, 19, 21** and **Genesis 21:1-5**. God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision, the covenant of works, when Abraham was 99. Write that down as an event. Exactly one year later, Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old, and Isaac’s lifespan is found in **Genesis 35:28**.

Write him into your chart, then write down the date of his marriage and children in **Genesis 25:20-21, 26**. They had twins, but we won't be interested in Esau again so just write him down there but make a lifeline for Jacob with the information in **Genesis 47:28**.

JACOB'S SONS

The dating of Jacob's sons is a bit tricky, because there are a couple of ambiguous statements; we can date Joseph very easily, but the rest take a bit more work. We know Jacob was 130 when he met Pharaoh (**Genesis 47:8-9**). We know that was the second year of the famine (**Genesis 45:6-11**). We know that before that were seven good years (**Genesis 41:47**). And we know that Joseph was 30 years old at the beginning of the first good year (**Genesis 41:46**).

Thus, we subtract from Jacob's 130 years the 2 years of famine; 7 years of plenty; and Joseph's age of 30 years; and we find Joseph was born when Jacob was 91. Joseph was sold into Egypt at 17 (**Genesis 37:2**), and died at 110 (**Genesis 50:26**). So go ahead and write all that down on your chart.

We don't know when Benjamin was born, but it is *likely* it was after Joseph was sold into Egypt because at that time, it *seems* his mother was still alive (**Genesis 37:10**). "Seems" is in italics because there is an argument against that, but we won't go into that now.

As a minor point, Joseph was a tattle-tale (**verses 2-3**), and that does not appear to be treated as a bad thing by the Bible. As for the rest of Jacob's sons, that requires us to backtrack a bit. Jacob fled to Haran, where Abraham's family was, to escape Esau, and there met Rachel (**Genesis 27:41-45, 28:1-5**). We are not told how old he was when this happened, but we can figure it out with some clever reasoning. **Don't write any of this down until I tell you.**

We know that Jacob worked for his wives for 7 years apiece, plus 6 years to round out twenty years, before he left Haran with all of his children and wives (**Genesis 31:38-41**). We know Joseph had been born in Haran, and Jacob left Haran soon after (**Genesis 30:24-25**).

This means Jacob would have arrived in Haran when he was 71, worked for 7 years for his first wife and began having children at 78. Thus leaving him 13 years to have all of his children. This is not impossible of course, with four women it's quite easy; however, it leaves several problems to be solved.

For example, Judah was Leah's fourth child, thus he would have been born at a minimum of four years later, when Jacob was 82. Then it says he married about the time that Joseph was sold into Egypt, when Jacob was 108.

Then he had children. The oldest, Onan, was old enough to take a wife himself, be killed; the next oldest was old enough to take her, be killed; then the youngest needed quite some time to grow up, then Judah married Tamar, she had twins, then one of those twins, Pharez, was old enough to have *children of his own* when they went into Egypt (**Genesis 46:12**)... all within the space of 22 years, by the time Jacob was 130!

That's patently impossible, unless Judah's children married and had children at 8 years old. Even if you say that Judah married earlier, before Joseph's sale into slavery, Judah was born at 82 years of Jacob, minimum, allowing that he might have married as early as 15, thus had his first child when Jacob was 97... that still only allows another 11 years, and it is still quite impossible.

If Jacob went to Haran at 71, it raises another problem; after Jacob left, Esau went to Ishmael to get a wife (**Genesis 28:9**). You'll see the problem with that if you refer to your timeline, for Ishmael *died when Jacob was 63!* See, that timeline of yours is already being useful!

TWENTY OR FORTY?

So again, challenge your assumptions. We're basing all this on the statement of Jacob that he had been with Laban for 20 years in **Genesis 31:38-41**. But read that carefully. Analyze it. What other possible interpretations are contained in those verses? Could it be that those twenty year periods, mentioned separately, are in fact *separate periods*?

They aren't described the same; "**this twenty years HAVE I BEEN WITH THEE**; thy ewes and thy she-goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten" and "**thus have I been twenty years in thy house: I SERVED THEE** fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle; and thou hast changed my wages ten times."

Those are similar, but not identical. In one, he SERVED Laban, for his cattle and daughters. But in the other he was WITH Laban; not as a servant, but as a partner or friend. The Hebrew supports this, because each time the word "twenty" is used in this passage it is prefaced by the word *zeh* (which isn't translated into English in most Bibles).

When repeated, like "*zeh* twenty... blah blah blah... *zeh* twenty" this word is used to separate two distinct things, as we say "this twenty and that twenty, the one twenty or the other twenty". Examples of this usage in scripture include **Exodus 14:20**, **Ecclesiastes 6:5**, **Job 21:23-25**, where clearly contrasting ideas are separated.

So a better translation of this passage would be "**DURING THE ONE TWENTY YEARS I WAS WITH THEE**; thy ewes and thy she-goats have not cast their young, ... **DURING THE OTHER TWENTY YEARS FOR MYSELF, IN THY HOUSE, I served ...**"

This solves all the problems posed above. It has Jacob going up to Laban when he was 51, marrying Leah at 58, Rachel at 65 (though he may have married her at the same time as Leah, but didn't finish paying for her until he was 65); working to start his own flock for 6 more years; and then for 20 years working with Laban as a partner. Write all that into your timeline.

So we've solved all the problems in this area... unfortunately, this is a dead end. There is genealogical information carrying us through Egypt, but no direct "and he lived... years, and had a son, and he lived... years, and died". **Fortunately, whenever the Bible leaves a gap like this, it gives us a bridge to span the gap.**

THE SELFSAME DAY

Israel was in Egypt for some time, and when they left Egypt, what did God say? **Exodus 12:41**. So that was the end of 430 years, but 430 years *starting when?* Exodus doesn't say. But Paul did! **Galatians 3:16-17**. **So Israel left Egypt 430 years, to the exact DAY**, after God confirmed a *spiritual* covenant about Christ with Abraham.

By now, you should know immediately when that was; **Genesis 15:1**. The other covenant in **Genesis 17** wasn't about Christ, it was a physical covenant of circumcision. What's more, God confirmed nothing there; Abraham did the confirming when he circumcised himself and his household.

But it's worth examining **Genesis 15** once more, because there is another layer of meaning in there. Remember that Israel left Egypt on the first night of unleavened bread, the day after they observed the Passover.

In **Genesis 15:1-6**, God made a spiritual promise of salvation. But what time of day was it given? We can see clearly from the text that it was done in the evening, *because there were MANY stars out!* Yet when did **verses 7-11** take place? Fowls were coming down upon the carcasses, which makes it almost certain it was daylight since scavenger birds are not usually active at night.

But we can know for sure, because what happened in **verses 12-18**? So this sun going down must have happened a full day LATER, for the sun was ALREADY down when the first verses were spoken, else no stars could have been seen!

So first, God gave Abraham the *promise* of salvation – IF Abraham trusted Him, and of course he did. Then Abraham prepared the sacrifice the next afternoon and the next evening God came again and ACCEPTED the sacrifice, and Abraham received the CONFIRMATION of the covenant when the smoking furnace passed between the pieces!

Now consider what happened in Egypt; on one evening, they were given the *promise* of salvation from the death angel, IF they trusted God and put the blood on their doorposts. This was in the evening. The death angel came at midnight and killed those who didn't believe. The next day they prepared unleavened bread and gathered their things together, and the next evening they left Egypt rejoicing, for God had ACCEPTED their sacrifice, and their freedom from Egypt was CONFIRMED!

That is why in **Genesis 15:12-16** God prophesied of their bondage in Egypt AND their deliverance from Egypt! And when they left Egypt, God said it was *430 years later to THIS exact same day!* Proving both the dating of the Exodus, and that **Genesis 15** took place on the evenings of Passover and the Night To Be Much Observed (the beginning of ULB)!

So on your chart, go back to Abraham's 85th year and, perhaps above the people in the chart, draw a line 430 years long and at the end of it put a vertical line and the word "Exodus". Most chronologists date the Exodus from **Genesis 17**, and so all the rest of their dates are off. A few date from **Genesis 12**, which is quite absurd; but almost no one dates from **Genesis 15**.

This is one reason why I said long ago that understanding the holy days is essential to properly understanding the Bible; without them, this wouldn't make sense; with them, it's obvious. However, there are a few questions that if you're paying attention have already come to your mind. In **Genesis 15:13** there are a few difficult statements.

First, God said "they shall afflict them 400 years". This is patently impossible because Israel's entire time in Egypt from the entry of Jacob to the Exodus was about... well, use your own chart and you'll see. But Hebrew doesn't make a distinction between cardinal numbers (10) and ordinal numbers (10th). So this could just as easily mean "until the 400th year", thus, until the 400th year *from that moment*, not after 400 years spent in Egypt.

Second, why did God say 400 years (or the 400th year) when it clearly was 430? This I cannot answer. I would be embarrassed to tell you how much time I've spent thinking about it. The only answer I can give you, which may not satisfy you (because it doesn't satisfy me), is that God was "rounding down". God does do that sometimes (for instance, **Exodus 12:37**, **Numbers 11:21**, compared to **Numbers 2:32**). Every other solution I've seen breaks many more things than it fixes.

Third, God said Israel would return to the Promised Land in the 4th generation. Yet if you count the generations from the entry to the Egypt to the Exodus in, say, the line of Ephraim you find **nine generations** from Ephraim, who was born in Egypt, to Joshua, who left Egypt with Moses (**1 Chronicles 7:20-27**).

Yet God said four – and He meant four. See **Exodus 6:16-20**. In the line from Levi-Moses only four generations passed in Egypt. But they stretched the time out a lot more than Ephraim. Surely people thought God had forgotten His promise, since so many generations had passed in most tribes. God often makes us wait a long time, but never breaks His promise (**2 Peter 3:9, Luke 18:7**).

EXODUS TO SOLOMON

Since we now have a bridge over the time in Egypt, we can tie people's lives to it and fill in some of the gaps. The generations of Levi have no dates for the births of the children, but they do have ages in **Exodus 6:16-20** which allow us to get a general idea of when they lived – you can pencil your best guesses in on Levi, Amram, and the rest if you like. **Just be sure you make a notation that this is an educated guess, not a proven fact.**

Back to proven facts, we know Moses was 80 years old and Aaron was 83 at the Exodus (**Exodus 7:7**). So we can subtract their ages from the time of the Exodus and know when they were born. Their deaths are recorded in **Deuteronomy 34:7, Numbers 33:38-39**, respectively. Draw that all that in.

They entered the Promised Land shortly after Moses' death, 40 years after the Exodus (**Joshua 1:1-2**), so go ahead and draw a 40-year line and title it "Wilderness", and then a vertical line at the 40 year mark for "Promised Land".

After the entry to the Promised Land, dating gets very murky and complicated. There is information there, but sorting it out is an exercise in hair-pulling, so we will save that for another lesson. Working it out now would bog us down too much, so we're going to use another bridge to skip over this period for now.

For the next 500 years or so Israel was ruled by a system of judges, with a loose, decentralized government. This is all contained in the book of judges and the first few chapters of Samuel; then we came to Saul, then David, then Solomon.

With Solomon we have a bridge, for in **1 Kings 6:1** we have a solid connection of 480 years back to the Exodus (not the entry to the Promised Land, but the Exodus). At this time, it was Solomon's 4th year of reigning. This is a very clear, unambiguous scripture. And you know the rule – **clear scripture interprets unclear, not the other way around.**

Unfortunately, in **Acts 13:17-21**, Paul gives us a completely different story that appears to contradict this scripture. If you add up all the time periods Paul mentions, you come up with a period of 573 years from the Exodus to the building of the temple. Clearly, we have a problem.

But again – what are we assuming? If you read it closely in many translations (RSV, BBE, etc.), it doesn't even make sense as it reads, not even with 573 years – for it says that God

1. Put up with them in Egypt, and led them out
2. Dealt with them in the wilderness 40 years

3. Then gave them their land for an inheritance for about 450 years
4. AFTER THAT gave them Judges (thus, all the judges were in *addition* to the 450 years (BBE, RSV, etc. – KJV doesn't translate it this way)
5. Then Samuel the prophet
6. Then 40 years of Saul
7. Then David (who reigned 40 years)
8. Then Solomon (whose 4th year brings us to the construction of the temple)

That is how it literally looks, and if you add all that up as it reads, you could come up with over 1,000 years, which is obviously wrong. However, always remember – CLEAR scriptures first! We KNOW how clearly it said “480 years after the Exodus, Solomon built the temple”. That is our guide! There are no assumptions, no room for interpretation; it should take a powerful stack of proofs to move us from the conviction that it was 480 years from the Exodus to the temple!

And yet **Acts 13** is also true and inspired by God. However, it IS vague; it contains MANY latent assumptions. MUCH room for interpretation. What's worse, different versions read differently. For example, your Bible may not imply #4 above; but if you look this up in several different translations, you will notice that the phrase “about 450 years” moves around the sentence in each translation, ***changing the meaning of the verse each time!*** That alone should make you cautious about putting too much trust in your understanding of this verse!

If you read the commentaries, you will see that the interpretation of this passage is hotly debated. Bottom line, there is no known solution that does not require stretching this scripture to the limit, or else deleting the other one. I don't like that, but that's the way it is. There are ways of interpreting this scripture that minimize the difficulty, but none that I am certain are correct.

I will present the options and let you choose for yourself which, if any, you like. **But never forget – we HAVE a clear answer, in 1 Kings 6:1. Acts 13** must be made to fit IT, not the other way around, for **Acts 13 is hazy and difficult to translate. 1 Kings 6:1** is not hazy – it is plainly stated. So, other ways of interpreting **Acts 13:17-20** include...

1. The period did not begin with the Exodus, as it appears, but rather “when God chose our Fathers”, which, if you started counting with Isaac (though there is no real reason to start with him), comes out close to (sort of) 450 years between Isaac and the Exodus. But when you back up and look at what Paul was trying to say, this has no bearing on the subject and there is no indication whatsoever that this is the right intent. This is the world's best guess, and as you can tell, I don't like it.
2. That “All these things” is better placed elsewhere in the sentence. Languages sometimes do quirky things and this is at least plausible, and glancing at different translations will show that they aren't sure where this really belongs in the sentence.

If #2 is correct, the translation might read “*And all these things [from the Exodus to David] took ABOUT [this word is definitely in the Greek] 450 years. Then God found David...*” Yes, this is a slight

stretch, but not beyond the bounds of possibility, and it is at least in line with the intent of Paul's statement.

If true, this solves our problems much more neatly, for if you add 450 years to David's 40 years of rule, and then Solomon's 4th year, you wind up with 493 years to the construction of the temple – only off by 13 years. And Paul *did* clearly say “about” 450 years – not *exactly* 450 years.

So go ahead and put down 480 years from the Exodus to Solomon's 4th year. Then back up 4 years and start Solomon's reign there, and draw a line 40 years long to the right to represent Solomon's rule (**1 Kings 11:42**). Then make a small vertical line up on the left of Solomon's line and connect him to David, and draw a 40 year line for David. Then another line above and left for Saul for 40 years.

From here on out, we'll be focusing only on the *rule* of kings, not on their ages. So the “lifeline” will only represent rule lengths from now on.

THE CHALLENGE

With the death of Solomon the kingdom split and Rehoboam took the southern kingdom of Judah, and the dynasty of David continued to rule Judah until the captivity of Babylon. Meanwhile, Jeroboam took the northern kingdom of Israel and because of his and their many sins, Israel went through many different dynasties.

So now you will have to maintain two threads on your chart; one for the kings of Israel and another for the kings of Judah, starting with the death of Solomon. So draw a vertical line at the end of Solomon's reign across your chart, near the top put “Kings of Judah” and near the middle put “Kings of Israel”. Put a short line to indicate the first king of each one, and place his name on the line.

Now for the challenge – I'm not going to help you any more. It's time you stood on your own and practiced some truly independent Bible study using the principles you've learned here. (And yes, this exercise will be on the test.) So starting in **1 Kings 14:19-20**, skim your way through the rest of 1st and 2nd Kings.

You don't need to read every word in these books, but **you do need to notice the reigns of each and every king**; then do the same thing starting in **2 Chronicles 12:13** and skimming the rest of the book. You'll notice one of these books focuses more on the Judean kings and one on the Israelite kings (I'll let you figure out which one).

If you've kept up correctly, you should have the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdom at 2980 FC – if not, check your numbers again. Now as an added challenge, but vitally necessary for accuracy's sake, **every time you can connect between kings, do so!**

As an example, and to show you why you must do this, turn to **2 Kings 14:23**. This tells us that Amaziah had already been king in Judah for 15 years when Jeroboam II (the Bible doesn't call him Jeroboam II, but he's the second king named Jeroboam, so....) came to the throne in Israel, taking his father Joash's place.

(Joash is the same name as Jehoash in Hebrew, so the same person is referred to by different names in Kings and Chronicles – this happened several times. Your Bible's margin may mention this.) Now turn to **verses 15-17**. Notice that Amaziah lived after the death of Jehoash/Joash king of Israel for 15 years. That's 15 years after the beginning of Jeroboam II's reign began, since he took over when Joash died.

To recap: Joash died; Jeroboam became king of Israel; 15 years later, Amaziah king of Judah died. Right? Now turn to **2 Kings 15:1-2**. Notice what just happened? Azariah, Amaziah's son, began to reign in Judah *in the 27th year of Jeroboam II!* But Amaziah had stopped reigning in the 15th year of Jeroboam, which leaves us with a GAP in the kings' lists!

Many people don't bother to do their research thoroughly and when you just add up the reigns of all the kings, it's easy to miss these sorts of things, and most people do! And when they do, **it appears that the king lists are inaccurate, because they don't add up – unless you take the time to do it RIGHT!** Even many professional researchers have overlooked these gaps.

We don't know what happened in the gaps, or why they are there; nor does it really matter. The Bible left us all the tools we need to find an accurate date for these things, if we use them. So when you see "and he began to reign in the 20th year of that other guy" *mark it on your timeline to double-check your work!*

You will find three such major gaps, including this one. There are many smaller ones. You'll also occasionally see where one person reigned only a few months; yet we know that when someone reigned 30 years, odds are it wasn't exactly 30 years. But the errors round themselves out and average out to being pretty accurate, as you'll see. Especially when you cross check the kingdoms as I just showed you how to do.

So when you have a few months, round down to zero. When it's almost a year, round up. When it's in the middle, try to add them together and estimate; we aren't trying to be perfect, but we want to be accurate to within 2 years, plus or minus, at the worst.

So that's it – start studying!

****much furious page-turning, ink-scribbling, and time-passing later****

That should have brought you down to the destruction of Samaria and the Assyrian captivity on the one hand, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity on the other. After a while you were just working on Judah alone, since the Israelite kings had gone into captivity. If you did it right, you should have the captivity of Israel in 3250 FC, or about 269-270 years in both lines for the period of two kingdoms. The final destruction of Jerusalem should be in 3382 FC, 133 years later.

Incidentally, that should have given you a bit of a taste of the sort of raw research that goes into many of these lessons. And the sort of research that will be expected of you one day – for this course is only the *beginning* of your studies. **And there are times when I have done a day's research in order to correctly write a single paragraph.**

TROUBLESHOOTING – JOINT RULE

I know I said I wasn't going to help you, but there are some common mistakes that you should know about. First, it has always been a common practice for kings to associate their heirs to the throne before they die; whether because of age, or illness, or simply a desire to retire. This way the son is trained in ruling the kingdom and when the king *does* die, the transition is smooth. It avoids civil war by leaving no doubt who the next king should be.

What this means is that sometimes, reigns are counted from the beginning of their co-reign, and sometimes they are counted from the beginning of their sole rulership. As an example, look at **2 Kings**

1:17. According to this Ahaziah died and Jehoram of Israel reigned in his stead in the second year of Jehoram of Judah, who was the son of Jehoshaphat.

However, later in the same book, in **2 Kings 3:1**, it tells us that this same Jehoram of Israel began to rule in the 18th year of Jehoshaphat, which would have been 6 years earlier! Since both are true, the only answer is that Jehoram of Israel was associated with his father's throne in the 18th year of Jehoshaphat; but didn't become sole king until six years later, in the second year of Jehoram of Judah!

But why would Ahaziah have associated his son with his throne so early in his reign, so that they were ruling jointly for 6 years? Read the context! **2 Kings 1:2-4, 16.** Ahaziah suffered a severe injury! So severe that he wasn't sure he would survive at all; so naturally he sought to unload some of the burden of rule on his son!

Also pay close attention to God's curse through Elijah; he didn't say Ahaziah would die right then! He said that he would not recover from his sickness *until* he died! According to your chart, that took six years to happen. Thus the apparent contradiction is resolved! Be on the lookout for joint reigns with 2 or even 3 kings at once, you'll discover many of them in this study.

TROUBLESHOOTING - ASSUMPTIONS

Another example of the type of problem you must resolve is **2 Kings 15:30**. Because according to the very next passage (**verses 32-33**), Jotham only reigned for 16 years! Therefore, how could Pekah have been killed in the 20th year of Jotham?

You must enter these sorts of questions with the attitude that it *can* be resolved, it's just a matter of finding the solution. **What are you assuming?** What does it really say? Why did it say it? The standard questions that you've been asking since the very first lesson.

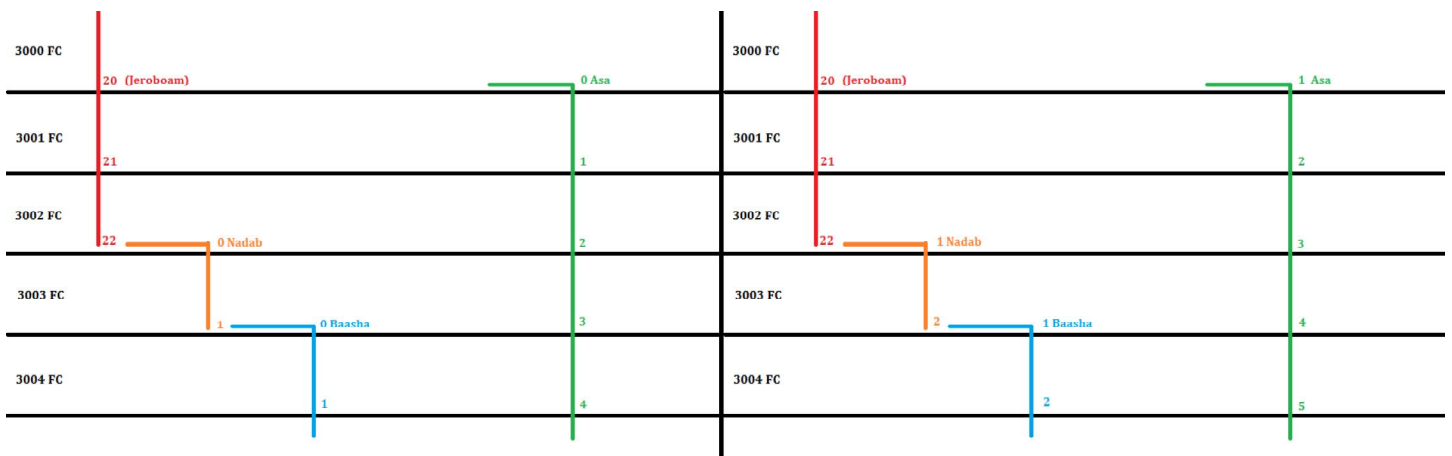
In this case, unlike with many kings, it doesn't say "and he reigned 16 years and died". He says he reigned 16 years. Then later, it says that he died. In our earlier "contradiction", it was assumed that he died at the end of his reign!

But if he stayed alive, still technically the king but "retired", then the 20th year of Jotham would still be a valid dating method! Ahaz his son began to reign in the 17th year of Pekah, which would be Jotham's 15th year of reign (**2 Kings 16:1**). So he was associated for one year before Jotham retired, and Jotham continued to live for some unspecified time before he died. He simply wasn't involved in ruling anymore.

TROUBLESHOOTING – USING ZEROS

When it says someone began to reign in the 25th year of someone else, many people instinctively put a "1" beside the "25" on their chart, but that's wrong. The reign *began* in the 25th year; putting a "1" there implies that the first year *ended* in the 25th year, which of course isn't what happened. So what you should do is put a "0" next to the "25" to indicate the beginning of a reign.

There are two charts below. One is drawn with a zero year, one without. Notice the difference it makes! On the left, Asa's "0" year is in Jeroboam's 20th year; this is the correct way. On the right side Jeroboam's 20th year corresponds with Asa's 1st year – which is wrong! Adding it up that way would lead to large errors at the end of the chart.



Also, remember that “25th” isn’t the same as “25”. In other words, the “25th year” of someone’s reign is a period that includes a full year from the conclusion of 24 full years of reign to the conclusion of 25 full years of reign.

Minor discrepancies up to a year or so can be explained by this sort of inexactness in the chronology, for example in **2 Kings 8:25** compared to **2 Kings 9:29**. However, these sorts of problems are usually resolved by the next king’s reign, when it is tied to the opposite kingdom, and any gaps or overlaps are resolved.

BABYLON TO CHRIST

With the fall of Babylon and the carrying away of the last of the captives in 3382 FC, that chapter of Biblical history ends. But the period in Babylon was bridged by a prophecy of **Jeremiah 29:4-14**. Note that this was specifically addressed **ONLY** to the Jews who went to Babylon, and very specifically *not* to the Jews who remained in Jerusalem and later went down to Egypt (**verses 16-18**).

So this tells us that from the time they went to Babylon (3382) until the time they returned would be exactly seventy years, or 3452. Unfortunately, after this date – approximately 500 years before Jesus was born – there is a gap and no known *Biblical* information exists to fill it. The Bible is simply silent on the subject.

We know some things that happened after this, such as the events in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, etc.; but there are no dates, no ages, no reigns, nothing to connect this with the next major event *using the Bible alone*.

However; God did not tell us things we could see for ourselves. He did not tell us the sun rises in the east, nor that there are 29.5ish days in a month, nor that the Earth revolves around the sun. He figured when that was important, we could figure it out for ourselves. And we have.

We have no reliable, undisputed, dating of any Biblical event before the fall of Israel. We have myths, sketchy carbon-dating and pottery-shard dating, dubious debates about Israel’s sojourn in Egypt (which are almost always wrong, by the way – the world is looking for Moses in the wrong Egyptian era altogether).

But the fall of Israel is the first event for which we have *reliable* extra-Biblical evidence to support Biblical dating. The Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians and other later kingdoms were mostly sun-

worshippers and were obsessed with astrology. The motions of the planets were incredibly significant to them, so most of their science/religion was based on astronomy.

They kept detailed logs of things like eclipses, new moons, and so on – *things that we can accurately calculate today and compare to their records*. So when they say that, say, an eclipse of the sun happened in the second month of the third year of king so-and-so's reign, and that an eclipse of the moon happened in the third month of the fourth year of king so-and-so's reign, we can quickly calculate when there was a solar eclipse followed by a lunar eclipse a year later and visible from that part of the world, and from that we can establish an exact date and time for the king's reign; and then, knowing that, we can date all the other events in the kingdom that were based on his reign.

Based on evidence like this, we can be pretty sure that the last Israelites were taken captive in 718 BC. You can go ahead and write that down, next to your FC date for that event. We have *very good proof*, based on about a dozen eclipses, that Jerusalem was destroyed and the last Jews taken captive in 585 BC. This date is so solid that no one argues it – and considering how many people bicker about religion, that means it is SOLID.

This means that the Jews returned from Babylon in 515 BC, 70 years later. And then we have a gap until the next solid date; the reign of Artaxerxes. Besides being, arguably, one of the most fun names in the Bible to say out loud, Artaxerxes is famous for only one thing; giving the Jews permission, and a fat stipend, to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. But before we can go into that, you need to review a bit of the history of the Near East.

Incidentally, you should start a new area on your chart, wherever you have space, perhaps at the bottom, to record the reigns of these pagan kingdoms, for comparison and historical context with the Israelite and Jewish kingdoms. And write in the major events you read about above and will read about below.

Note that you will be working in BC dates for pagan kingdoms, which you can measure back using the fall of Samaria and Jerusalem as reference points. Remember that BC dates go backwards, so if someone was born in 600 BC and lived 60 years, they died in 540 BC – numbers count down.

PAGAN KINGDOMS

The following is not based on Biblical history, but on clay tablets that have been found with eclipses and other evidence and is pretty much agreed on by everyone. You need this framework to better understand the state of the world during the last years of the Israelite and Judaic kingdoms.

The Assyrian kingdom was a major force in the Near East for several hundred years, but its peak began around 900 BC. During the next three hundred years, it conquered most of the known world, ruling over Babylon, Israel, Egypt, and most of the rest of the Middle East. But as all empires do, it fell into decline, became complacent and sinful, and God set out to destroy it – but, as He always does, He sent a prophet to warn them: Jonah.

You know the story of Jonah so I won't go into it in detail, but suffice it to say, that Jonah did warn them, they did repent, and so God gave them more time. In the end of course, they were destroyed. The capital of Assyria was Nineveh, which was conquered by the Babylonians in 612 BC.

Some of the royalty escaped and set up a new capital and a new king to continue the resistance in Haran (Abraham's home village, you may recall). He was finally killed, and the Assyrian Empire

effectively destroyed in 608 BC. There was some fighting for another three years, but it was more out of spite on the part of the vanquished Assyrians than a real hope at winning.

The Assyrian Empire was destroyed by the Babylonian Nabopolassar. He turned over the throne to his son Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC. What is interesting is that **Jeremiah 25** prophesied both the rise and fall of the Babylonian Empire, and the exact length of time it would exist. **Jeremiah 25:3** tells us this was written about 615 BC, and **verses 8-14** tell us that the Babylonians would hold sway for 70 years.

The destruction of Haran was in 608 BC, and in 539 BC Cyrus the Great, a Persian, conquered the city of Babylon – fulfilling the 70 years God prophesied. Counting from different times of the year, or from slightly different events, would explain the slight discrepancy.

Cyrus began a new empire, called the Achaemenid or Medo-Persian Empire. It was the largest world-ruling empire yet, with influence from Greece to India. God had prophesied the rise of Cyrus and his use to destroy Babylon about 300 years earlier in **Isaiah 44:24-45:1-6, 13**.

This is one of the more remarkable prophecies in the Bible because God prophesied, by name, the rise of an empire, the destruction of another, and the *release* of the Jews from captivity 200 years before they *went into* captivity! Not only that, but God prophesied that Cyrus would release the Jews “not for price or reward”, that is, with no coercion or bribery. Which is exactly what happened, as the Bible and secular accounts all agree.

The details of how God did that were also prophesied. He said “*I will open before him ...gates*” which “*shall not be shut*”. In order to approach Babylon, Cyrus had to cross a large fortified wall called the “Median wall” and the river Tigris, neither of which were easily accomplished. The Babylonians had a bridge across the river, no doubt protected by gates.

The pivotal battle took place at the city of Opis. Few details of the battle survive, but Cyrus won a crushing victory and “broke through” into the heart of the Babylonian Empire. God “broke the gates” in the wall for him, because God “held his right hand”.

He also said “I will dry up thy rivers”. Babylon itself had tremendously fortified walls, but it was fed by a major river, the Euphrates, which ran right through the middle of town. Naturally the river itself could not be fenced off, but it had gates which went down to the water level.

According to the ancient historian Herodotus, shortly after the battle of Opis, Cyrus conquered Babylon by positioning his armies at the entrance and exit of the river, and then digging a canal to divert the river. With the river diverted, his armies could walk under the walls and right into the middle of town, taking the Babylonians by surprise and conquering the city in a single night, during a major religious festival. Thus, God “dried up the rivers”.

It should be noted that Herodotus’ account is scorned by historians as an invention, but Herodotus had no reason to invent a story that so closely matched God’s prophecy. The rest of the story came from contemporary sources.

That they were conquered during a major religious festival is also based on pagan histories, but it is certainly the exact same event as in **Daniel 5** – particularly **verses 30-31**. God also prophesied that Cyrus would have an empire that stretched “*from the rising of the sun (east) to the west*”. And strangely enough, Cyrus gave credit where it was due in **2 Chronicles 36:22-23, Ezra 1:1-11**.

RETURNS OF THE JEWS

One of the first things Cyrus did was to return the Jews, just as God had prophesied, in his first year, which was 539 BC. But notice specifically what his proclamation was: “*to build God a house at Jerusalem*”.

That was the purpose of this mission, and not all the Jews returned from Babylon, because the 70 years of the Jewish captivity was not yet completed – most of them hadn’t gone into captivity until 585 BC. But 42,360 people returned then, plus 7,337 servants (**Ezra 2:64-65**). It should be remembered that many Jews had gone into captivity much earlier. For them, the captivity of 70 years was almost completed.

It took a few years to build the foundations of the temple, which is talked about in **Ezra 3**. Trouble happened, as recorded in **Ezra 4**, and the work was effectively stopped for a long time, through several kings, until the reign of Darius.

According to secular history, the first king of Persia, Cyrus, ruled from 539-530 BC. Then Cambyses II ruled from 529-522, followed by a brief reign by Smerdis in 522, then Darius from 521-486. Then Xerxes I from 485-465, then Artaxerxes I from 465-424. Go ahead and write them all on your chart, you’ll need them soon.

Back in **Ezra 4:5-7**, you see the whole period of time was enclosed between the reigns of Cyrus and Darius; in between them, you see “Ahasuerus” and “Artaxerxes” mentioned. Comparing that to your chart, you can see that there was no Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes ruled much later. But that passage implies that Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes (that’s just so fun to say) were the same person.

Most historians think that Artaxerxes generally refers more to a title that Persian kings adopted than to a proper name. Thus, both of these names probably refer to Cambyses II, since he ruled at the proper time. According to **Ezra 4:24-5:2**, the work ceased until the second year of Darius, which would be 519 BC or so.

The rest of the chapter contains a letter sent to Darius reminding him that Cyrus had given them a royal charter to build the temple, **Ezra 6** contains record of Darius’ search, his decree, and the completion of the temple (**verses 14-15**) in the 6th year of Darius, or 515 BC – which, as you’ll notice, happens to be precisely 70 years after the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

But now more time passes (**Ezra 7:1**), and we are down into the reign of Artaxerxes in 465-424 BC. Note that up until this time Ezra was not mentioned; these things happened before Ezra came on the scene; he was merely recapping them in his book. He entered the stage in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (**Ezra 7:6-10**), which would have been 457 BC.

And he brought with him a third decree from a Persian king, the decree of Artaxerxes (**verses 11-28**), which gave them remarkable autonomy. But this decree was *not* to rebuild the temple, as the prior two had been; **this one, unlike the prior two, gave them authority to rebuild the city of Jerusalem itself**. This is VERY important as you will soon see.

The rest of the book talks about the establishment of the priesthood, and the sins of the Jews in taking strange wives again – all around 457 BC. Nehemiah opens in the 20th year of Artaxerxes, or 445 BC. So 13 years had passed since Ezra’s return, and very little had been accomplished (**Nehemiah 1:1-4**).

The next two chapters of Nehemiah detail his journey to Jerusalem with the king's blessing, the rebuilding of the walls and the strife with the locals who didn't want Jerusalem rebuilt, more sins of the Jews, and the revelation that Nehemiah was in fact sent by Artaxerxes to be a governor, although he didn't take the liberties of his office (**Nehemiah 5:14-15**). This brings us up to the 32nd year of Artaxerxes, 433 BC.

At that time Ezra was still around as the priest, but Nehemiah was the governor (**Nehemiah 8:1-2**). After keeping the feast, they took an oath not to intermarry with the heathens (**Nehemiah 10:29-31**), nor to work on the Sabbath.

Then Nehemiah left to go to see Artaxerxes – this journey took 4 months each way, according to **Ezra 7:9** – and when he returned he found that the Jews had once *again* sinned greatly in his absence (**Nehemiah 13**), and were breaking the Sabbath, abandoning the temple, and had once again – this was the second time since the captivity – married strange wives and were following *their* religion.

DANIEL'S PART IN ALL OF THIS

With that outline, we need to fit a few characters into the story. Daniel was taken captive with the first wave of Jews in 603 BC (**Daniel 1:1-7**). He was obviously young, called “a child” at the time. Most likely he was a teenager.

This was very early in Nebuchadnezzar's reign, as you can see from your chart. Daniel had a roller-coaster of a career in Babylon, falling in and out of favor with the kings. We've referenced all of Daniel for various reasons in these lessons already, but now we are going to look at a little of it from a historical standpoint.

Daniel, thanks to the blessing of God, went from being third in line in Babylon to being the third (possibly second) in line in Persia (**Daniel 6:1-5**). And Darius wanted to promote him further, but naturally the locals didn't want a foreign prime minister. Then of course Daniel spent some time snuggling with lions, and continued to prosper as long as he lived, which was well into the kingdom of Persia.

During the first year of Darius, 521 BC, Daniel understood Jeremiah's 70 weeks prophecy (**Daniel 9:1-2**). As the highest ranking Jew in the world (except the distant daughters of Zedekiah, who hardly counted for this group in Babylon), he was authorized to repent for his people. So **Daniel 9** contains that repentance, then God's answer came in **Daniel 9:20-27**.

This is a pivotal scripture you'll use extensively in the next lesson. In fact, this is the single most important scripture in all of chronology. In **verse 24** Gabriel tells Daniel that “70 weeks” are required to finish up the plan of the OC, anoint Jesus, sacrifice Him for sins, resurrect Him to bring about “everlasting righteousness”, and so on.

As you know well, God often uses the day for a year principle. Seventy weeks is 490 days, thus, 490 years would be required to make all those things happen. And the clock would start on these 490 years at “the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem”.

According to **Ezra 6:14**, there were three kings who gave decrees to rebuild Jerusalem – Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes in 539, 519, and 457, respectively. But Cyrus and Darius did not send commandments to restore *Jerusalem. Only the temple.*

The first king to send a commandment about the *city* was Artaxerxes, in 457 BC. The date of the reign of Artaxerxes is very solidly established by astronomical data, so these dates are very reliable. So in **Daniel 9:25**, Gabriel says counting from 457 BC, there would be 7 weeks and 62 weeks (49+434=483 days=483 years) until Jesus came.

According to that calculation, the Messiah would come in 27 AD. This was a well known and often-studied prophecy in Judea in NT times, and that is why they were *expecting* and *looking* for the Christ then! (**John 1:19-27, 40-41, Matthew 11:2-3**). Jesus began teaching after the end of the 69th week, or the 483rd year, from the decree of Artaxerxes.

That began the 70th week (**Daniel 9:27**), which we will study in agonizing detail in the next lesson.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

So using only one method – that of adding up the dates in the Bible and reasoning out and understanding what the Bible means – we have established a continuous chronology stretching from the creation of the world until the return of the Jews from Babylon.

We have significant overlapping evidence, which fully supports the Bible's version of events, to date the fall of Israel, Judah, Babylon, and so on. The Bible gives us relative dates between these events, and secular history gives us the actual dates BC and also confirms the Bible's relative dates, which gives us considerable faith in its accuracy.

If this is accurate, and if you've done your chart well, you should be able to add your FC date for, say, the fall of Judah to the BC date of 585 and arrive at date for the creation of the world – 3968 BC.

However, while quite reliable, this is only one line of evidence. We could have made a mistake. There could be a textual error we didn't notice in the Bible. Stretching a line of history into the past is rather like stretching a measuring tape and holding it away from you; the farther away from you it gets, the more the tape sags and sooner or later it will buckle.

So we need someone to hold the other end of that tape, so to speak; something to give us a second witness, a firm anchor on which we can date the history of the world. And for that, you need the next lesson...

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