

Chronology, Part 2

Last time, we dug through the facts of chronology, trying to get the big picture of the story of the Bible. Next time, we will dig through symbolism and try to see the big picture through a different lens. This time, we need to fill in the blanks. There are a lot of things about chronology and history that are not a part of the big picture *per se*, but are still worth knowing. So that will be...

LESSON 55: CHRONOLOGY, PART 2

Before we dig much farther into chronology, you need to think clearly about how BC/AD works since most of you have never dealt with it closely. It's a bit hard on the brain at first, so bear with me. BC years count DOWN, not UP. So the fall of 721 BC is followed by the spring of 720 BC.

This is not so hard to understand, however there is also no "zero year". So when the fall of 1 BC came and went, that spring was the spring of 1 AD. This is important because it means that when you're passing from BC dates to AD dates or *vice versa*, **you gain a year**.

In other words, 25 years from 20 BC is not 5 AD (as you would intuitively think it would be), but rather 6 AD. It works the same going the other way. So when you're spanning dates from BC to AD, you subtract the little number from the bigger one and then ADD 1 to compensate for the lack of a zero year. In our example above it the equation looks like $25-20=5+1=6$.

Or suppose we wanted to know what 1,000 years from 721 BC was. We would take $1000-721=279+1=280$ AD. It's not so hard; you just have to wrap your head around the idea. Of course, this is only true if you pass over the nonexistent year zero... Otherwise, it's simple addition and subtraction; 50 years after 1980 BC is $1980-50=1930$ BC.

DIFFERENT CALENDARS

Now for another fun quirk of Biblical chronology that makes it hard: We use the Gregorian calendar, which has nothing in common with the Hebrew calendar. Our years start January 1st, our months last 28-31 days, etc. And for consistency, when we refer to dates in the past, we use this calendar to describe periods long before the calendar was in use.

But most ancient cultures had their own calendar. And most calendars were different. I mention this again because when you see dates like "spring of 700 BC", *BC dates are counted in Gregorian years, but spring of 700 BC in the Hebrew calendar could have been a year earlier*, depending on how the Hebrew new year fell.

To make that clearer, let's say you found a date of January 15, 700 BC. Now according to the Gregorian calendar, that date is accurate. It is shortly after the new year... *our* new year. But according to the

Hebrew calendar, January 15 would be sometime during the 10th month of 701 BC – because the *Hebrew* new year isn't until sometime around the spring equinox, in March or April!

For most of you, this won't ever matter. And I don't want to discourage you because this isn't *that* important. But you need to understand the limitations and complications we face; most of these questions *HAVE* answers, but the pat answers we are handed by commentaries and pastors are often quite wrong because they haven't taken into account all of the *MANY* complications that affect accurate dating.

In the Bible we are usually working with Hebrew dates, and these dates will not correspond perfectly to Gregorian dates without some effort on our part; most of the time it isn't worth it, so unless noted otherwise we *always* assume we are working in Hebrew dates. The Bible always is, except occasionally when it deals with pagan kingdoms.

THE BOOK OF JOB

Job is actually one of the oldest books of the Bible, if not the oldest. Think about it; when you've read Job, did you see any references to “the greatness of God who led Israel out of Egypt”, such as there are in virtually every other book of the Bible? In all of God's boasting in **Job 38-40**, it isn't mentioned at all. This suggests that it hadn't happened yet.

Also, Job's three friends can help us to date the book to a general period in history; Eliphaz the Temanite; Bildad the Shuhite (the shortest man in the Bible... he was only a Shu-hite...); and Zophar the Naamathite.

Eliphaz and Teman were son and grandson of Esau, respectively. So Job's friend was a descendant of Teman (a Temanite), who was named after Teman's father Eliphaz. This Eliphaz was probably not too many generations removed from Esau, since Teman is still the tribal name. Let's say, for fun, about 100 years after Esau's death, or around 1,600 BC.

Bildad's tribal name, the Shuhite, was named for Shuah, son of Keturah, the second wife of Abraham. Shuah would have been born around 1,880 BC, and let's speculate that he died around 1,780 and Bildad was born, again, maybe 100 years later – that puts the timeframe around 1,680 BC. The third friend, Zophar, was from a place, Naamah, which is not known, so he's no help.

Finally, and most importantly, Job himself appears as one of the children of Israel who went down into Egypt in **Genesis 46:13**. As son of Issachar, grandson of Jacob, we can make an educated guess as to when he lived. Given the order of Jacob's sons, Issachar was probably born when Jacob was about 75-80.

Issachar probably had his first son about 35, based on the other patriarchs listed in **Genesis 11**. So let's say Job was born when Issachar was about 50. That means he was born about 1,736 BC; 5 years before the entry into Egypt.

He had to have been born before 1,731, because he was on the list of people who went into Egypt then! And he wasn't the youngest son of Issachar to go to Egypt, so it had to be at least a year or two before then; so 1,736 is a reasonable date.

But how old was Job when the events in the book of Job happened? Well, old enough to have ten grown-up children, by only one wife, who were living in their own houses, and to have amassed great

wealth (**Job 1:1-4**). Remember, they went into Egypt with very little; to have grown this great, even with the blessing of God, takes time.

So let's say he was 35 when he had his first child; had a child every year or two; then his children grew up and moved away from home at 20-25. It's a fair assumption to say he was about 70 when the book opens. But there's another very good reason to believe that number!

In **Job 42**, after Job passed his test, God blessed him – with what? **Verse 10**. How long did Job live *after* his trial? **Verse 16**. So if he lived 140 years *AFTER* his trial, and if God was rewarding him with twice what he had before, it stands to reason that he had lived 70 years *BEFORE* his trial! Plus, 70 is a round number God uses a lot in the Bible.

That tells us the events in the book of Job took place approximately 1,666 BC. And remember that our guesstimates of the ages of Job's friends put them living in the 1600's BC as well; this is a nice tie-in. You can put this in your chart, by the way.

It also means Job was still alive in the time of Moses, and died about 15 years before the Exodus; however, he lived "in the east" (**Job 1:3**), apparently not in Egypt with the rest of the Israelites, so it is probable Job was not involved with Egyptian politics in his old age and did not know Moses.

None of this matters much in the larger scheme of things, but it shows you the sort of information that can be pieced together in the Bible if you work at it. Job was clearly wise, and it may be that family trait which led to the sons of Issachar (Job's cousins and descendants) being put in charge of the calendar of Israel (**1 Chronicles 12:32**).

JOSHUA

How old was Joshua when he died? **Joshua 24:29**. How long after did Israel continue obeying God? **Verses 30-31**. We know how old Joshua was when he died, but we do not know his age at the entry to the promised land, so there is no way to exactly figure his age at any particular point in history.

We do know that he was older than 20 when they scouted the promised land, for he would have been killed except for his faith (**Numbers 14:29-34**). Since they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years after that, it makes him an absolute minimum of 60 years old when he entered the promised land. Thus if he died at 110 years old, it could have been no more than 50 years after he entered the promised land, and probably far less.

After all, that number assumes that Joshua was 21 at the time of spying; it is highly unlikely Moses would have chosen a spy to scout the land that was only 21 years old – and the older he was then, the less time he spent in the promised land as an old man.

We can establish a bracket of probability by comparing Caleb, the only other survivor of the same spying trip, and he was 40 years old when he went spying with Joshua (**Joshua 14:6-7**). It is logical to assume that Joshua was of similar age. If so, then he would have been 80 years old when he entered the promised land, and since he died at 110 he led Israel in the promised land for about 30 years.

Don't put that on your chart yet – we have more information which bears on the subject to uncover.

PERIOD OF JUDGES

We established earlier that the period of judges, including the reigns of Saul, David, and 4 years of Solomon, and also including the time of Joshua and the wandering in the wilderness, was no more than 480 years.

We just concluded above that the death of Joshua was most likely around 30 years after the entry to the promised land. But we need to know how long “the elders who outlived Joshua” lived (**Judges 2:7**), because the end of that period marks the beginning of the first captivity; for reasons I’ll explain below, I made an educated guess that the period of Joshua and the elders was about 37 years total.

Go ahead and put that on your chart, but with a “!?” attached. Sometimes we have to make educated guesses, but it’s very important to keep those guesses separate from the facts. I like to use “?” for a pure guess, and “!?” for an educated guess.

Counting back from the other end, David and Saul’s reigns were 40 years each (**Acts 13:21, 2 Samuel 5:4**). And the 480th year from the Exodus came in the 4th year of Solomon’s reign (**1 Kings 6:1**). Thus, if we subtract 84 years for the monarchy from 480, we have 396; if we then subtract the 37 years of Joshua and the 40 years in the wilderness, we have 321 years. That is the period of the judges.

But reading the book of judges makes it look quite impossible to fit all these judges into only a few hundred years. Yet we know they must. The problem is that Hebrew makes no distinction between cardinal (80) and ordinal (80th) numbers.

In other words, when I say “he judged Israel 80 years”, that might mean what it sounds like in English; that his period of power as a judge lasted 80 years; *or* it might mean that his period of judgment lasted *until the 80th year* from some other event. There is no way of telling based on the language alone.

Take the first example; we know Joshua died and when he and the elders who outlived him were dead, Israel sinned (**Judges 2:7-11**). So God punished them, and sold them into captivity to other nations; then raised up judges to deliver them *from that captivity* (**verses 12-19**). I emphasize that because the judge’s job was *to deliver from a captivity*; that will be important later.

From the passage you just read you can see that contrary to what you might assume, there was not an unbroken chain of judges, like kings, ruling Israel. Judges were raised up *as needed*, to deliver from a captivity. And once they were raised up, they kept advising Israel for the remainder of their lives, apparently. But they were not there constantly. That was the job of the priesthood, to educate people on a daily basis (**Malachi 2:7**).

In **Judges 3:8** we see the first captivity, to Mesopotamia. It lasted 8 years. Then God raised up Othniel, Caleb’s nephew. And they went out, and delivered Israel. And then it says “*the land had rest 40 years*” (**verse 11**).

So if we put this on our chart, should we write down cardinal numbers, as in $40+8=48$ years... or should we treat these numbers as ordinal? If they are ordinal numbers, then Israel sinned (year 1), Israel was taken captive and served Mesopotamia until the 8th year (from the sin); then God raised up Othniel and he delivered them from the captivity, and they had rest until the 40th year (from the sin, *not* his first year as a judge!).

Then they sinned again, (year 1 again), and the cycle goes again. In this way, it can all fit nicely. Without this, it is quite impossible to fit all the judges into the time we have. Even the most generous chronology wouldn't have enough time for all of them. Therefore, when we have eliminated the impossible, what is left must be true.

However, we can confirm that we are on the right track by using **Judges 11:26**. Here, in heated conversation with their enemies the Ammonites, Jephthah said “*while Israel dwelt in Heshbon [these] three hundred years...*”. The point Jephthah was making was, Israel possessed the land now by common law.

However, our point for these purposes is that Israel moved into Heshbon about three years before the entry to the promised land (it's located on the east side of Jordan) (**Numbers 21:25**). And if you look at your chart after you add in all the judges, counted in ordinal numbers, you will see that from the dwelling in Heshbon to the time of Jephthah is not exactly 300 years, but quite close. Far closer than it could have been if we had taken cardinal numbers as our guide.

In casual conversation or heated debate, you are never accurate; you always round, and usually round up. We all do this. You wouldn't say “For 287 years we've lived there, and you never complained then!” – you would always say “for 300 years”. It sounds more impressive and is simpler. And God clearly used approximations in the Bible on several occasions (compare **Numbers 1:46** and **11:21**).

So that helps bolster our confidence in this method of counting the judges. Now go ahead and do this for the rest of the book of Judges, and put it on your chart. Stop when you get to **Judges 13:1**. You'll notice for the last several judges, many short periods are used, and they are consecutive without captivity in between. God appears to have been trying a different strategy to keep Israel righteous, which worked no better than the other way.

SAMUEL

Between **Judges 13** and **1 Samuel 12** the timing of events gets very murky. I've reconstructed a plausible version of events but it's complicated, so bear with me. In **Judges 13:1**, Israel is delivered into captivity to the Philistines for 40 years. Looking at your chart, you've already drawn in David and Saul, so you see there is only 40 years between **Judges 13:1** and Saul. So this has to be the SAME captivity – there would be no room for another one, anyway!

The early part of **1 Samuel** overlaps with **Judges 13** and possibly **Judges 12** as well. The loss to the Philistines is described in **Judges 13:1** and in **1 Samuel 4**. This makes a bridge between these two scriptures. There Eli dies, after having judged Israel for 40 years (as a priest, apparently in a different capacity than Jephthah and Elon who must have been contemporary with him), and the Ark was lost to the Philistines.

At that time, Samuel was a young man, whom all Israel knew was going to be a prophet (**1 Samuel 3:20**). Now reading **Judges 13:1** carefully, it doesn't say they were *slaves* 40 years! It said they were “*delivered into the hand of the Philistines*” for 40 years – that is, that each time they fought, they lost, which naturally eventually resulted in a state of occupation. They didn't stop losing until the time of Saul (**1 Samuel 9:16**), when there were still garrisons posted in Israel (**1 Samuel 10:5**).

Therefore, between these two events was 40 years. The period between the death of Eli and the first captivity under Mesopotamia is easy to establish as 280 years. This leaves 37 years from the entry to

the promised land for Joshua, and the elders who outlived Joshua, to die, and for Israel to sin and enter the first captivity. (This in turn means Jephthah's "300 year" claim was about 287 years).

After the Ark was lost to the Philistines, it was in Philistia for 7 months (**1 Samuel 6:1**). The Philistines, tired of hemorrhoids, returned it to Israel, and the divinely-guided cattle took it to Bethshemesh (**verses 7-14**). Israel, having learned no respect at all for the power of God, looked into the Ark and died by the thousands (**verse 19**). Rather than repent, they gave the problem to someone else, a city called Kirjath-Jearim, where it stayed in the house of Abinadab for 20 years (**1 Samuel 7:1-2**).

Now the strange thing – **verse 3**. Eli died when the Ark was taken, and Samuel was young, yes; but respected. Why did Samuel wait 20 years to bring the Ark back to the tabernacle? And why, only then, did Samuel become a judge? (**verse 6**).

SAMSON

We must use our bridge to answer. Remember back in **Judges 13**; just after the loss of the Ark began the Philistine domination, God made a promise; **Judges 13:1-5, 24**. The whole point of Samson was that "*he shall BEGIN to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines*". Samson wasn't going to defeat them! He was going to BEGIN to deliver them.

This vision had to happen after the Ark was lost, and the Philistines' 40 years began. And notice Samson was to BEGIN to deliver them; so it couldn't be at the end of the 40 years, since he wouldn't be the one to finish the job! And according to **Judges 15:20**, he judged, during the Philistine domination, "twenty years", or "until the *twentieth year*".

If true, then in the twentieth year of the Philistine captivity, Samson died. And, amazingly, at this SAME TIME, Samuel stirred up Israel to bring back the Ark. His response had to be a direct result of what happened to Samson – the two periods of twenty years cannot be a coincidence!

Samson was a martyr, an Israelite who obeyed God (mostly) and resisted the Philistines successfully, and killed many of them. He HAD to be a popular hero, and after he was martyred, Samuel was able to use his death as a rallying cry to whip a crowd into action – that had to be the motivation for finally bringing back the Ark after 20 years!

But that makes us wonder how that could possibly fit – because Samson would have been only about 20 years old when he died, if that's true. It seems he was born shortly after the Ark was lost. And also that he died 20 years later. Will the events in Samson's life fit?

Let's summarize; he wanted a wife. He got married, but that turned out poorly so he killed some Philistines. The Philistines killed his wife and father-in-law. He killed more Philistines. The men of Judah bound him and gave him to the Philistines. He killed 1,000 more Philistines.

He loved Delilah, which also turned out badly, so he tried to kill more Philistines (it was Samson's answer for everything, it seems), but instead he was blinded and taken captive. At this point, he was chained to a mill, and his hair began to grow long again.

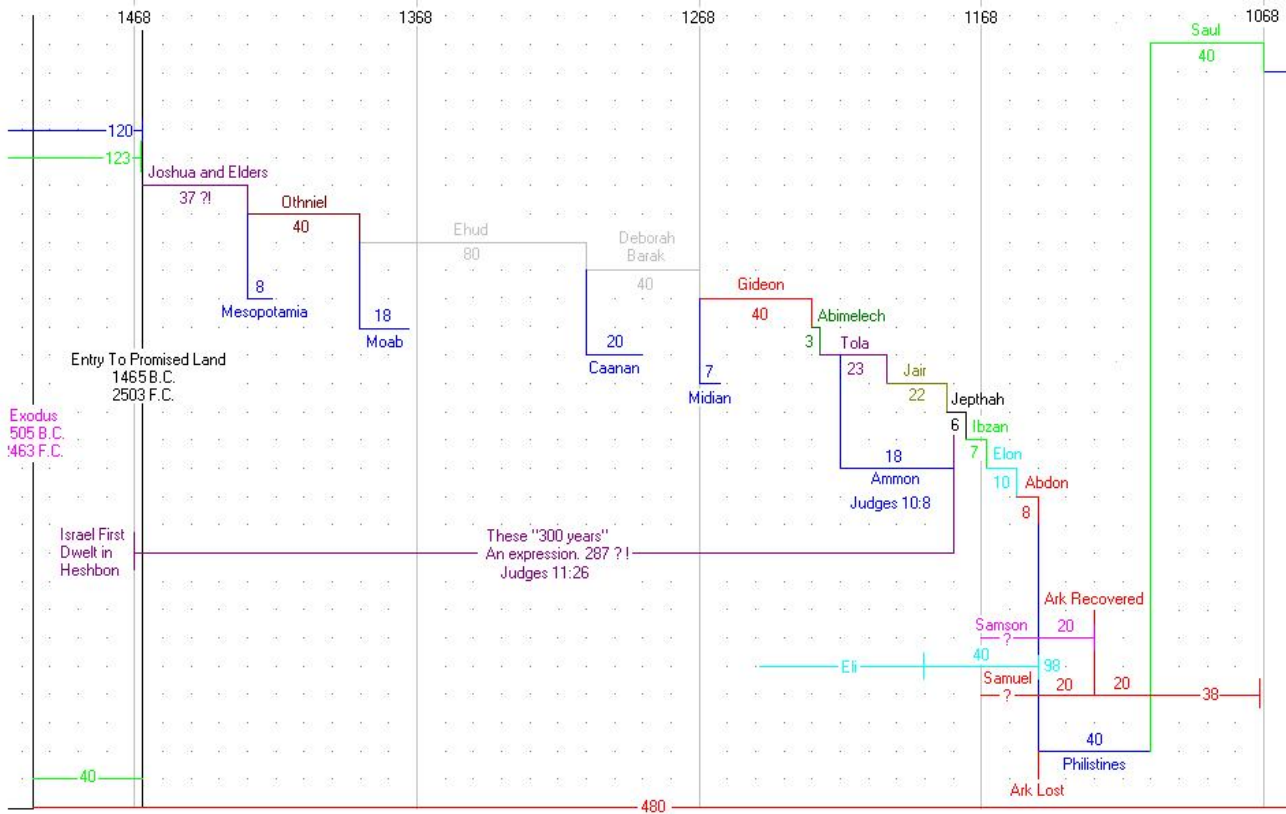
Then, at a yearly festival for Dagon he killed more Philistines than he had in his whole life put together. That festival cannot have been too long after he was captured; long enough for hair to re-

grow, yes. But not so long that he had been seen by all the Philistines; he was still a popular enemy (**Judges 16:24-25**). People start to lose interest in their conquered enemies after a few years.

All of these things could have taken less than a year. And there are no good places to insert a large gap in the record of Samson’s life to allow 20 years of actual day-to-day judging; I mean, think about it – where would he have taken the time to sit on a bench and dispense justice? Before he was married? Before Delilah? These events all seem to be connected by a fairly small amount of time. So it seems that he judged Israel “until the 20th year” of the Philistine domination, and died quite young.

As for Samuel, he was probably 30-40 at the time of Samson’s death, and he judged Israel for quite some time... long enough for his children to grow up , and be set as judges themselves. 20 more years, making Samuel about 60, is plenty for this.

That was the excuse Israel used for demanding a king (**1 Samuel 8:1-5**), actually – Samuel’s evil sons. So Saul was appointed. At the time of Saul, there were still garrisons of the Philistines in Israel, and Saul led Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, ending the forty years. It makes everything fit; it’s the most plausible explanation I’ve heard, at least. Since this is a really complicated section, I’ve included a small chart to explain how this fits together.



Incidentally, Samuel died shortly before the death of Saul – a few months or years, based on the events surrounding it (**1 Samuel 25:1**). If he were about 60 when Saul was appointed, and Saul reigned for 40 years, then Samuel died a few years short of 100 – 98 is a fair guess, so that’s what’s on the chart.

EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

Reading these books superficially, you get the impression that they overlap a lot, and talk about the same events. But as you look at them closely, you realize there is a significant gap between them, and

what happened was not duplication, but repetition; that is, God didn't record the same event twice, a similar event happened twice.

It's worth your time to read through both books, they're not that big, and get the highlights of them; but I'll summarize here. In **Ezra 1:1** we find the first year of Cyrus the Persian. This was 539 BC, the same year Babylon fell.

He sent a wave of Jews back to Jerusalem, under Zerubbabel and Joshua (**Ezra 2:2, 3:2**). They worked on the temple and so on, had problems, setbacks, etc.; but they kept working on it and finished in the 6th year of Darius, or 515 BC. So already, the first six chapters of Ezra have spanned 24 years – and Ezra himself has not been mentioned yet.

Ezra 7 is placed in the 7th year of Artaxerxes (**verses 1, 7**), or 457 BC. So now, from the beginning of the book of Ezra, 82 years have passed before Ezra came on the scene in person. This also means that the Nehemiah mentioned in **Ezra 2:2** is not the same person as we'll meet later in the book of Nehemiah – just like every George in history is not the same person.

In **Ezra 9:1**, shortly after arriving in Jerusalem, still probably within the same year of 457 BC, Ezra discovered that the Jews had intermarried with pagan wives and were following their idolatries... the same old story.

Ezra repented, prayed, and the people promised to put away the strange wives and their children and send them home (**Ezra 10:1-5**). And they did, though there were so many it took three months to get them all sorted out (**verses 9, 17**).

Nehemiah 1:1 opens in the 20th year of Artaxerxes, 444 BC – 13 years later. Nehemiah wasn't mentioned in the book of Ezra because, if he had ever been in Jerusalem before, it wasn't noteworthy. Also, this is nearly 100 years after that other Nehemiah was mentioned in **Ezra 2:2** – I dwell on this because it's surprising how many people are confused about the dating of these two books.

So Artaxerxes sent Nehemiah to Jerusalem as governor, and they had the various misadventures described in the book, and he governed Judah 12 years (**Nehemiah 5:14**). Meanwhile, Ezra was the priest (**Nehemiah 8:1-2**).

As always, they had ups and downs; keeping feasts, making covenants, then breaking them; but the point I want to make is that in **Nehemiah 13:23-30**, we once again see people who were taking wives of the pagans around them. This was in direct violation of their oath less than 30 years earlier, which had been renewed not too long before (**Nehemiah 10:29-30**).

So their time in captivity had taught them nothing; they behaved now precisely as they had behaved under the judges, with brief periods of righteousness punctuated by large stretches of blatant rebellion. Because of this final straw, God did not ever again give them total autonomy, but kept them under the rule of other empires. It was easier to punish them when they were Roman subjects or Persian subjects than when they were independent.

So it is to these people, punished until God was tired of punishing, people who absolutely refused to remain righteous for any length of time – and yet who believed they were the beloved people of God – it was to them that the book of Malachi was written, roughly 400 BC, just after the time of Nehemiah.

And these people correspond surprisingly well to the Protestant Christians of our day, who say “God bless the USA”, then follow the commands of the great whore, not God; who have abolished the law, yet believe in doing “good”; who say “we haven’t stolen from God”, yet who don’t tithe; who say “we keep our promises”, while getting divorced; who say “there is no profit in serving God”... when they haven’t ever done it properly. Read through Malachi, and see if it doesn’t apply to the false churches in *your* town.

But ranting aside, and back to the point of this section, the events of Ezra and Nehemiah spanned over 100 years, from 539 BC to 432 BC, possibly more. The only later book in the OT is Malachi, which was probably written about 400 BC.

Some of the minor prophets were written at the beginning of this period, contemporary with Zerubbabel and Joshua, such as Haggai and Zechariah, and of course parts of Daniel. Speaking of Daniel...

NEBUCHADNEZZAR’S MADNESS

One of the most pivotal books of prophecy, Daniel is heavily criticized by all secular writers as impossible, written by multiple writers, written far later than purported, perhaps even in the time of Christ; generally a fraud on every level.

This is not surprising because Daniel is arguably the most openly critical book of the world’s empires and false religions in the OT. It also contains more fulfilled prophecies – and thus, proof of God’s existence and authority – than any other book in the Bible. So discrediting it is essential if the world is going to reject God’s word.

One of the main attacks on Daniel is that if the story of Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity were true, there should be some record of him not reigning for 7 years. Surely, they say, a 7-year interruption in the reign of the king of the world would be mentioned!

They trumpet this rather loudly, but the plain historical facts are astonishing when you take the time to study them. First, read the story they criticize in **Daniel 4**. Note particularly **verses 24-27** and **32-37**. According to secular history, well established with ancient tablets that have been recovered and translated, Nebuchadnezzar reigned from 605 BC until 562 BC. Write all these on your chart.

Then a series of 3 kings reigned. The first was Amel-Marduk (translated Evil-Merodach in the Bible) who reigned from 562-560, and was mentioned in **Jeremiah 52:31**. According to that passage, 37 years from the time Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive was the first year of Amal-Marduk.

Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive in the 12th year of his reign, and if you add 37 years to that you find that the Bible agrees completely with secular history – that Nebuchadnezzar reigned 49 years total! But wait!

After Amal-Marduk’s three years, Neriglassar (also called Nergal-Sharezar) murdered him and reigned four years from 560 to 556 BC. He was also mentioned in the Bible in **Jeremiah 39:13**. Then his son ruled for one year in 556 BC, after which he was murdered and Nabonidus became king and reigned until the fall of Babylon in 539 BC.

Nabonidus was an interesting king, because he was believed to be crazy by most of the contemporary world. He ruled only briefly at Babylon before leaving the rule of the kingdom to his son Belshazzar.

He spent most of his reign in voluntary exile at Harran, promoting a monotheistic religion based on the worship of the moon.

So how can the Bible and history both be true? Easy! To start with, insane rulers are almost *always* covered up. Look at medieval history; the nobles who are in power cover up the fact that the king is crazy, both to protect their jobs (by keeping themselves in power), and to protect their heads (in case the king ever is sane again and finds out).

Nabopolassar 626 BC – 605 BC

Nebuchadnezzar II 605 BC – 562 BC

Amel-Marduk 562 BC – 560 BC

Neriglissar 560 BC – 556 BC

Labashi-Marduk 556 BC

Nabonidus 556 BC – 539 BC

With that thought in mind, this chart shows the dates of all the rulers of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Notice anything unusual about the dates? After the death of Nebuchadnezzar, you notice a grouping of very short reigns.

And if you count the years between Nebuchadnezzar's reign and Nabonidus' reign, you find six years! Why is that so significant? Because if you allow for a few months to a year for the news of Nebuchadnezzar's insanity to leak out, and for him to be officially deposed by a new king, it makes exactly seven years between the two kings!!

Remember, Nebuchadnezzar was cursed to be crazy for seven years, at the end of which he was to be restored to power. ***So allowing a few months for someone else to take power, there were exactly seven years between the beginning of his insanity, and the beginning of the reign of Nabonidus!***

Do you really believe that's a coincidence? What's more, Nabonidus instituted many religious reforms, which although not really Biblical reforms, at least showed his heart was in the right place. From the time he left Babylon the festival of Tammuz (a precursor to modern Easter) was not celebrated.

According to the contemporary Nabonid chronicles, it was not celebrated from the seventh year (when he moved to Tema, in the region around Harran) until the 17th year – which means the first time it was celebrated again was the year 539 BC! Quite probably at the very feast mentioned in Daniel where the writing on the wall appeared, the night of the destruction of Babylon!

Now read that story in **Daniel 5**. According to **verse 2**, Belshazzar was Nebuchadnezzar's son. While it is true that *sometimes* son means grandson, it is not the first assumption you should make. Now look closely at **verse 7**; did it ever occur to you that, in this stressful situation, the best Belshazzar could offer was to make Daniel the THIRD ruler in the kingdom? Why not make him the second, as Nebuchadnezzar had done? (**Daniel 2:48**).

*Because that wasn't his to give! Because Belshazzar was HIMSELF the second ruler in the kingdom, subservient to Nabonidus! In **verse 11**, the queen says twice, in painfully clear language, that Nebuchadnezzar was his father, not his grandfather. Daniel says the same thing in **verses 18 and 22**.*

I mean, how much clearer could the Bible BE? “*in the days of thy **father** ... whom the king Nebuchadnezzar **thy father, the king, I say, thy father,** made master of the magicians ...*” (Daniel 5:11). I mean, COME ON! **In what clearer words could God say he was the literal son of Nebuchadnezzar??**

What would God have to say to prove that he was a son, *not* a grandson or merely a royal successor! *He could not have been any clearer! That, together with the facts of history, proves he was the literal son! And that in turn proves that Nabonidus and Nebuchadnezzar were the same person!*

Based on all this, the obvious conclusion is that when Nebuchadnezzar went crazy and started fighting the cows for the best grass, his son Amel-Marduk reigned; he was killed by one of Nebuchadnezzar’s generals, Neriglassar, who had also married one of Nebuchadnezzar’s daughters.

After Neriglassar’s death *his* son Labashi-Marduk reigned for one year before being murdered – possibly by supporters of Nabonidus. After that, Nebuchadnezzar’s wits returned to him as did his former glory *but he was greatly humbled!*

In many ways, the person he had been before died. So it is quite possible he would change his name – there are many precedents for a name change a major change in a person’s life; Abram-Abraham, Jacob-Israel, etc.

No one quite agrees on how to translate the name Nebuchadnezzar, but it means something like “may [the god] Nebo protect the crown”, or “may Nebo protect the boundary”, or “Nebo defend my firstborn son”. We might compromise and paraphrase and say it means “God save the empire”.

Nebuchadnezzar, in his prideful way, seems to have built on his name and styled himself as the “beloved” and “favorite” of Nebo. *Not* humble titles. But Nabonidus has a much more humble meaning – much more in keeping with what we would expect the man who wrote **Daniel 4** to feel.

It means “Nebo [God] is majestic” or “Nebo [God] is praised”. This name is taken directly from the Bible, in **Daniel 4:34** and **37** *where the words came from Nebuchadnezzar’s own lips!* In essence, Nebuchadnezzar told us his new name right there – “God be praised” in English, could be translated as “Nabonidus” in Babylonian!

Seven years of grazing turned a man whose name meant “God save my great empire” into a man named “God is great”. To paraphrase, of course. Which is precisely what those seven years were meant to accomplish!

After this, Nebuchadnezzar/Nabonidus lost his taste for rulership and spent most of his remaining years studying history, archeology, and religion. While he was never converted, he became essentially a monotheist and *mostly* lost his taste for idolatry.

We know nothing of Nebuchadnezzar or Nabonidus’ age, but if we assume that he was young when made general by his father – say, 18, then this entire stretch of events until the fall of Babylon took about 70 years, making him 88 years old at the time, which is not at all improbable.

NABONIDUS AND NEBUCHADNEZZAR

But there is an even better, ironclad proof of all this! We have absolute archeological proof that Nabonidus was crazy for... wait for it... SEVEN YEARS!! From his own lips! Apparently, **Daniel 4** was

not the only time Nebuchadnezzar talked about it. In one of the dead sea scrolls, there is a document called the “Prayer of Nabonidus”. In it, Nabonidus is recorded as having said...

“...I [Nabonidus] was smitten with a malignant disease for a period of seven years, and became unlike men. But when I had confessed my sins and faults, God sent me a magician. He was a Jew from among those exiled in Babylon.” (Translated by J. T. Milik, Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judea, Pages 36-37).

This tells us that if this text is genuine, and if we believe the Bible, then we can only conclude that Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus were the same person! Their reigns were separated by precisely the right amount of time.

If it was a fraud, why concoct it? If Jews had done it, they would have taken the trouble to match the name to the story in Daniel. If Greeks or other pagans had done it to discredit the story in Daniel, they would have never given credit to the “exiled Jew” for healing him.

Yet in the Bible Nebuchadnezzar plainly says that after 7 years *“my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me”* (**Daniel 4:36**).

Thus the true facts of history ALWAYS vindicate the assertions of the Bible! The lesson here is less about the facts of Daniel, than it is to show you that secular historians, and indeed many so-called Christian ones, treat the Bible as fable and myth, legend and fancy; and their attacks sound educated and wise, authoritative and reasonable. They might make you wonder “maybe this *is* just a Hebrew fairy tale!”

But when you dig into their evidence, when you examine their assumptions – and your own – you will *always* find that the Bible is true. Examining the proof will only strengthen your case. It will not hurt your faith unless your faith was wrong to begin with, because God can be proven. God can be found – but not by those who don’t want to find him. And believe me, historians do *not* want to find God.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Speaking of which, let’s see what the facts of history tell us about John the Baptist. Ordinarily, as you know, I avoid secular history as much as possible when proving my point, but this is a (Biblical) exception, for God told us to use secular history here; see **Luke 3:1-2**.

God gave us a clear, extra-Biblical date for the beginning of John’s ministry; so clearly He expected us to use it. These dates were based on Emperor Tiberius of Rome, primarily. So when did he reign? According to the history books, Augustus Caesar associated Tiberius with the throne in AD 12.

They were co-rulers in Augustus’ declining years until Augustus died in AD 14 making Tiberius sole emperor. It was common practice for emperors to count their reigns from the first moment of power, and include the joint rule in their overall reign. Therefore the first year of Tiberius would have been AD 12.

Given that, then the 15th year of Tiberius would be AD 26-27 by the Roman calendar – i.e., January 1-December 31st. Remember, “the 15th year” is not the same as “15 years”; so sometime during the Roman year of 26 AD, John’s ministry began.

The Bible also tells us that Pilate was at that time governor of Judea. Pilate ruled for ten years. He was deposed a few months before Passover near the end of his tenth year. He hurriedly sailed for Rome to appeal to Emperor Tiberius. On the way news came that Tiberius died (Josephus' Antiquities, XVIII, iv, 2).

Since Pilate was in a hurry to reach Rome, having just lost his office, he probably left as soon as possible. However, a trip to Rome from Judea took quite some time. Tiberius died during the journey, in March AD 37, while Pilate was *en route*.

This means that Pilate must have left Judea to appeal in fall/early winter of AD 36. At that point, it was near the end of his tenth year of office; which means his governorship must have begun in fall of AD 26! Which means that John's ministry must have begun in fall of AD 26 as well, shortly after Pilate came into office! God specifically chose the reigns of people who overlapped only in a very small window – leaving no doubt as to when John began his ministry!

Given the importance of the holy days, and the old covenant significance of John the Baptist, it is almost certain that his ministry began during the fall holy day season, around the Feast of Tabernacles. Which exact day is debatable, I could see arguments for the Day of Atonement or for the Last Great Day, but regardless, it was certainly in that season.

And as it happens, we know that John was about 5-6 months older than Jesus; which means John should have been about 30 at this time, just as Jesus was when He began His ministry; and six months later, Jesus began His ministry in spring of 27 AD, just as **Daniel 9:27** prophesied 483 years before!

JESUS' BIRTH

There will be more arguments for this in the next lesson, using more Biblical proof, but since we're looking at secular sources let's go ahead and do this one as well. The Bible tells us that Herod killed all babies under 2 years old in a vain attempt to kill Jesus (**Matthew 2:16**). This tells us that Jesus was born before Herod died (**Matthew 2:1** says so as well).

In Antiquities of the Jews, XVII, vi, 4, the historian Josephus mentions an eclipse of the moon before the death of Herod. That eclipse, as calculated, occurred about March 13, 4 BC. Therefore, Herod died after that date. This sets the earliest-possible date for his death.

Quite some time later, according to Josephus, Herod went beyond Jordan to be cured of his illness. The physicians there could not cure him, but he had enough strength to return to Jericho. There, he tried to kill the principal men of the Jewish nation. Then, he had his own son Antipater killed five days before he died. Josephus says that all these and other events occurred after the eclipse, and that Herod died before a Passover.

Since he could not possibly have done all this before the Passover in April of 4 BC, then he must have died before the Passover in April of 3 BC – which is the latest possible date for his death. The traditional date is November 26, 4 BC, which is reasonable and close enough for our purposes.

So that means Jesus was born between these two dates – March 13, 4 BC, and November 26, 4 BC. The next question is, why did Herod kill babies 2 years old and younger? Isn't that a rather large and vague window?

I mean, if, as Christmas pageants tell us, Jesus was born when the star appeared and then the wise men went straight to Herod who promptly killed the babies, surely he could have killed all children under 6 months to be on the safe side; a newborn is easily discernible from a 6 month old!

The answer? Check your assumptions and forget pagan Christmas traditions! Get the facts in **Matthew 2:1-12**. The wise men went to Herod *first*. They hadn't seen Jesus, and didn't have any way of knowing how old He was! So Herod didn't ask them that; Herod asked them *how long ago the star had first appeared!* (**verse 7**).

But that answer was misleading. These men were "from the east". "The east" usually referred to the area around Babylon – a journey which took Ezra nearly 4 months to complete, which he considered an excellent time (**Ezra 7:9**). Hence, the star had appeared to the wise men many months before the child was actually born.

Herod, knowing that the star had appeared many months before, and being a monster so paranoid that he had his *own* son killed 5 days before his own death, was unable to determine exactly how old Christ was from the wise men because they didn't know! They hadn't seen Him yet! So Herod wanted to be on the safe side. And a child that is 6 months old could be mistaken for a child who is a year old. However, he could not pass for a 2-year-old.

This does not confirm absolute dating, but it does tell us that Jesus was born well before Herod's death in November of 4 BC. A fall birth in 4 BC would be hard to argue, but a spring birth would be quite easy to accept based on the facts of history. More on that in the next lesson.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

History is worth knowing for its own sake. Because we believe the Bible does not mean we do not care about *all* knowledge, whether history, science, math, health, or geology. In fact, quite the opposite; a love of law equates to a love of truth. And truth is valuable, no matter what the subject.

The Bible is ONE source of truth; it is the highest authority on truth; but it is only ONE source of truth. Everything that happens, or has EVER happened in the world, should also teach us truth – because *everything* testifies to the creation of God and the goodness of the law of God.

Job 12:7-9 *But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this?*

Poking into the facts of history can only help shed better light on the facts of the Bible. Knowledge is always preferable to ignorance. Of course, sometimes knowledge brings a burden all its own (**Ecclesiastes 1:18**), but that cost brings you great rewards (**Proverbs 24:3-6**).

There is SO much truth to be uncovered in history. That's sort of what **Romans 1:18-25** says – that if you read history, you will see over and over again that God reveals some portion of Himself, a fraction of truth to a culture; and then you can watch what they did with it. Ancient Greece for instance.

The Greeks had a great deal of truth. Socrates taught "love thy neighbor as thyself", believe it or not. But that principle got lost over time in empty words and as they professed themselves to be wise, they became fools. Like most if not all cultures, they first seized truth; then trivialized it, then corrupted it, then wound up worshipping the creature and not the Creator; so God raised up Rome to destroy them.

As you study history you will see this pattern repeated again and again in every culture, each in slightly different ways. And each time, these facts reveal a little more of God's reasoning. Atheists today say God is a monster for ordering Israelites to commit genocide in Canaan.

But when you learn that the Canaanites themselves were monsters who sacrificed their own children by roasting them alive in Molech's fire, you vindicate God's judgment. There is so much truth available to us today; so many things we can do to vindicate God, to show that His ways are fair and it is their way that is unfair (**Ezekiel 18:25-29**).

And each time we prove that God's way works, we judge the world (**Hebrews 11:7**). Whether it's by curing our own cold or building an energy-efficient house or learning how to raise respectful children, each time we follow God's laws, we prove that God's ways DO work, and we help remove the world's excuse for being selfish.

We have access to things that no true Christians in history ever had before; scientific advances have opened dozens of new fields of truth that need only to be fit into a Biblical framework. Relatively cheap travel and portable computers have made it possible for a small group of people to accomplish breakthroughs in understanding never before achieved.

DNA evidence and online rare-book libraries; careful excavations of ancient civilizations around the world; museums full of artifacts that were once behind the iron curtain; health and agricultural research that has never been done before. Literally any direction your interest wanders, you can find some way of learning truth that will prove God's way of life and condemn Satan's rebellion.

When you finish this course, and you will soon, understand that this is only the foundation of your learning. You will be expected by God to accomplish things with the talents (and with the talents) you've been given; and the more you've been given, the more will be expected. This course, and the Bible itself, is only your education, to give you the tools you need so you can work to give something back to the community of true Christians.

Learning never stops for a true Christian, nor does changing and growing; the moment that it does, you cease to be a true Christian and become just another old bottle – for that is the definition of an old wineskin; something incapable of changing and learning. All that's left is a person who has a name that they are alive... (**Revelation 3:1**).

This work is completely non-denominational and is meant to fulfill Christ's great commission to "*preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15). **This publication is not to be sold; "freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).**

The Bible tells us to PROVE ALL THINGS, and The Simple Answers encourages people to do just that. If you cannot PROVE what you believe, you have no right to believe it! Many of the things we print are shocking because they are different from what you've heard, but if something we say offends or upsets you, we hope you will take the time to set aside your preconceived ideas and PROVE your point from the Bible to see if you truly have been right all these years.

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