

Dating Ancient History

I have given dates throughout my writings as approximations. The more ancient the history, the more difficult it is to ascertain an accurate date and the less that the Bible and secular sources agree. We even have several significant problems within the Scriptures. I will deal briefly with each of these points.

Problems with dates in Scriptures:

1. We have already seen that there has been a significant corruption of the numbers found in various portions of the Old Testament.¹ When examining the descendants of Shem and attempting to work out a time line, it was shown that the Masoretic text differed considerably from the LXX in several significant instances in Gen. 11. Someone either added a hundred years to several times of birth, or subtracted same. Whereas the Masoretic text is deemed generally more reliable than the Septuagint, we cannot assume that it is always the correct reading.
2. We have two views of the amount of time that the Jews were subject to slavery in Egypt. There is the short view of 215 years and the long view of 430 years. There is a limitation on the time due to Moses' line (examine Ex. 2:1–2 6:16, 18, 20 Num. 3:17–19 26:57–59 I Chron. 6:1–3 23:6, 12, 13) allowing us 215 years at the most; and we have Gen. 15:13–16 Ex. 12:40–41 Gal. 3:17 which indicate a longer period of time for slavery. This will be covered in more detail in Exodus.
3. We have two views when it comes the period of the Judges: it either lasted for 311 (Num. 14:33 Joshua 14:7, 10 I Sam. 7:2 I Kings 6:1 2:11 Acts 13:21) years or 450 years (Acts 13:19–20). This will be covered in more detail when we deal with the period of the Judges.
4. These problems might be cleared up by a careful examination and comparison of the Scriptures (such was done with the events following the resurrection) and they might not be cleared up if we have an error in the length of time found here or there in Scripture.
5. When all is said and done, I could spend hours putting together to the best of my knowledge, a correct time line and, when all is said and done, this gives way to another theory which edifies very few. For this reason, I give dates and times as a place to hang one's hat, but not as the last word on the matter.
6. On the other hand, the numerology related to eschatology (future things) is very likely to be perfectly accurate as the 144,000 Jewish evangelists in the future will depend upon the correct rendering and understanding of the times and seasons in relation to the tribulation.

Dating in Secular History:

1. Men who record and research secular history are predisposed in several ways:
 - a) Most of them believe in evolution, which would preclude writing during the time the early portion of the Bible was written. Therefore, they believe that the Pentateuch could not be written in the times of Moses (when, in fact, Genesis was written long before even the time of Moses).
 - b) Because they believe in evolution, their tendency is see time where time does not exist (i.e., they expect that human history has run a million year course rather than a 6000-10,000 year course). However,

¹Don't misunderstand this as a majority of the numbers in Scripture are incorrect or even that 1/10 th of the numbers are incorrect; there are enough corruptions, meaning perhaps 4–15 which confuse the accurate dating of historical events.

population growth studies, the ages of the oldest trees and human records do not give man a million years worth of history but, rather 5000–6000 years at best.

- c) They tend to believe in a uniformity principal; that is, the valleys and mountains and canyons and seas of the earth are, generally speaking, the result of the processes of millions of years of steady erosion; there has always been a 365¼ day year; the rainfall and the atmosphere has always been what it is today.
- d) They assume that the earliest portions of the Bible were written by men not near as evolved as them, and therefore the Scriptures will be filled with errors and myth and are not reliable in their historicity. It will not matter how many archeological discoveries take place which verify various portions of the Bible; we could find the ark, the tablets of stone upon which God wrote the 10 commandments and this would make absolutely no difference to the secular historian. Therefore, when it comes to a hierarchy of data for the estimation of ancient historical dates, the Biblical record will take a back seat to anything else.
- e) If the Bible is God's Word, this predisposition is exactly what we should expect from unregenerate man. If the Bible were merely an historical document, then its relevance to the establishment of dates and ancient history would be more elevated in the secular world.

2. Methods by which secular man dates ancient history, listed in order of importance:

- a) Astronomical dating: When certain astronomical events are recorded in ancient literature, man uses retrograde calculations to move backward in time to set the date for that recorded observation. We have a series of eclipses which were recorded in Assyrian literature between 763 and 491 BC. If the observers recorded this information accurately and if modern interpretation of their records is accurate, then the dates assigned to these occurrences would be relatively accurate. However we do not have even one recording of an eclipse of the moon or sun wherein the time and place is clear before the 7th century BC. One of the very few astronomical events which can be used to date ancient history is the rising of the star Sirius. This star rises on the horizon just like the sun, but every day it rises about 4 minutes earlier. Once a solar year has passed, it will rise in the same place at the same time again. We have two recordings of heliacal rising of this star in Egyptian literature and all Egyptian history is hung upon the two dates determined by this record. These two particular dates (1872 BC and 1537 BC) may be fixed with a possible accuracy of ten years, **assuming** that Egypt always used a 365 day calendar. However, in the very Egyptian literature cited for these risings, we have allusions to a 360 day year and we are aware that Egypt also used a 320 day year (and they did use a 365 day year). This is only one of several problems with this method of dating.
- b) Carbon-14 dating: All carbon contains a very small amount of C-14, which is radioactive carbon. This C-14 disintegrates logarithmically. All living things consume and exude carbon throughout their lives and the ratio of C-14 to nonradioactive carbon is essentially the same in them as it is outside of them. When these living things die, then the carbon is no longer expelled from the body and the C-14 begins to disintegrate. By measuring the amount of carbon found in organic matter and measuring the C-14 as well, we can estimate when that living thing died. We are dealing with an extremely minute amount of C-14 and the supposition that the ratio of C-14 to carbon has been the same throughout the past 10,000 years of history. Once we have gone much beyond 5000 years, the accuracy of C-14 dating diminishes significantly because of the very minute amount of C-14 that is measured. In general, carbon dating sounds wonderful, and it is a good method on which to hang a time hat, but as an unusually candid expert remarked, "If a C-14 date supports our theories, we put it in the main text. If it does not entirely contradict them, we put it in a footnote. And if it is completely 'out of date' we just drop it."² One further problem with dating organic material, as the famous illustration goes: when one dates the wood found in a tomb, this date tells when the tree was originally cut down, not when the wood was put into the tomb. "The results so far obtained from the carbon-14...method of dating though agreeing in general with the chronological scheme adopted here, are

²Radiocarbon Variations and Absolute Chronology; C-14 Dating and Egyptian Chronology; T. Save-Soderbergh and I.U. Olsson; ed. I.U. Olsson; Stockholm, 1970

not sufficiently consistent to contribute much of value to our reconstruction of Egyptian history."³ It should be further mentioned that a *cross-check* has allegedly been done on carbon dating which should be dealt with here. Dendochronology, or tree-ring chronology, estimates that one ring on a tree is equivalent to one solar year. However, there are certain problems associated with this: (1) the production of tree rings is a seasonal phenomenon and if the seasons are abnormal in any way, then the number of tree rings will be different than the number of years; (2) our oldest trees date back to 2900 BC at their earliest; (3) there is a circular reasoning which is applied to this correlation of dating. When two tree samples are examined, C-14 dating is done **first** to determine their approximate age when cut, and then they are used to cross-check radiocarbon dating. (4) Finally, dendochronologists have thus far only published **their interpretations** of their data; they have not published the original data itself so it is not possible for others to check their conclusions.

- c) The third method of dating ancient history is by examination of the artifacts found in archeological sites.. However, these are classified as to the strata in which they are found which have been set up in the predetermined Early Bronze, Middle Bronze, Late Bronze or Iron ages. These subdivisions were determined in the 19th century and have not been changed, even though it is clear that the use of metals was not a world wide phenomena. Israel found people who used iron in Deut. 3:11 and Josh. 17:16–18 yet did not use iron against her enemies in I Sam. 13:19–22. The iron age in the Egyptian culture is said to have occurred sometime between 2000–700 BC, but it would have been impossible for them to have completed the incredible stone work in granite, basalt and kiorite without iron; yet it has been determined that occurred in the Bronze age. It is clear that one nation would use iron while simultaneously, another did not. It is not inconceivable that even in the same geographical location, during one century, a people use iron implements and a century or two later, the next occupying force does not.
- d) One of the most helpful artifacts of history are the king lists, found in Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. These give us a scope and sequence of kings. However, it is important to recognize that countries other than Israel exaggerated about the age of their country and the conquests and strengths of their kings—such exaggerations would reflect upon the importance of that country. Furthermore, some of these kings reign simultaneously (such as the two sets of kings in Israel and Judah).
- e) Unfortunately, the best historical document which we have, the Old Testament, is viewed with suspicion and disdain by the secular world. Our accuracy of manuscripts, honesty of the eyewitnesses and the objectivity of the writers is unparalleled in any ancient historical document outside of the New Testament.

³Cambridge Ancient History, 3rd edition, Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 192