

Chapter 5

Chronology of the Judges

The chronological chain presented in this study has one link that looks very fragile. In I Kings 6:1, we read that there was a passage of 480 years from the Exodus from Egypt until the fourth year of Solomon's reign. Since this is a long period of time that covers the wilderness sojourn, the claiming of the land of Palestine by Joshua, the period of the judges, and the kingships of Saul and David, we cannot help but wonder if some additional Biblical evidence might be available to support this one lonely statement.

We saw in Chapter 4 that the 430-year Egyptian sojourn was supported by the genealogical timetable of Levi, Kohath, Amram, and Aaron. Can we find similar Biblical data to support the 480 years under question? Let us begin to examine this question by first establishing the chronology of Saul, David, and Solomon. Then we will examine in detail the period of the judges. We shall discover that there is definitely another time bridge, in addition to that given in I Kings 6:1, that links the Exodus to the time of Solomon. We shall also discover the precise chronology of the period of judges.

A David And Solomon Co-Regency

Let us begin this part of our reconstruction by discovering the precise time sequence of the first three kings of Israel: Saul, David, and Solomon. To establish this sequence, we must first of all discover if there was a co-regency between Saul and David, or between David and Solomon. While the Prophet Samuel anointed David king when he was but a lad, the Bible shows in unmistakable fashion that David's reign began after the death of Saul. The first two chapters of II Samuel should be consulted to verify this. Therefore, we can know that Saul's reign of 40 years (Acts 13:21), was followed by David's reign of 40 years (II Samuel 5:4). Thus, a period of 80 years transpired from the end of the period of the judges until the end of David's reign.

But when did Solomon begin to reign? Was it upon David's death or was it earlier? We shall discover that Solomon began to reign four years before David's death so that the fourth year of Solomon's reign coincided with the end of David's reign. Let us see how the Bible shoves this.

The Bible shows a co-regency of David and Solomon of four years. The reason for the co-regency is easily found. First, Absalom aspired to be king when David was old (II Samuel 15:1-8). A few years later, another son of David named Adonijah declared he would be king (I Kings 1:5). Upon this turn of events, the Prophet Nathan instructed Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, to remind King David of his promise that Solomon would be the heir to the throne (I Kings 1:11-14). David, thereupon, before he died and ceased to reign, declared Solomon king (I Kings 1:32-37), in order to remove any doubt concerning his successor.

David had one constant and consuming concern in the closing years of his life. The object of this concern is the event that ties the reigns of David and Solomon together and gives the evidence upon which the length of the co-regency can be determined. This concern was that the temple should be constructed. David was not permitted to build the house of God; we read in I Chronicles 28:3:

But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood.

But David made all kinds of provision for this building. He made the decision where it was to be located (I Chronicles 22:1). He put stone-cutters to work to prepare stones for the temple (I Chronicles 22:2); he provided great stores of nails, bronze, and cedar for the temple (I Chronicles 22:3-4); he provided for the operation of the temple (I Chronicles 23:4-5); he had all the construction plans drawn (I Chronicles 28:11-19); he provided all the gold, silver, and precious stones required for the temple construction (I Chronicles 29:2); and he provided for the financing of the temple (I Chronicles 29:3-9). In other words, David performed every possible preparation so that the actual construction could begin.

Even though the Bible gives David a prominent part in this preparation, it was actually a joint venture of David and Solomon. In I Chronicles 22:2-4, we read:

And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel; and he set masons to hew wrought stones

to build the house of God. And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the joinings; and brass in abundance without weight; Also cedar trees in abundance: for the Zidonians and they of Tyre brought much cedar wood to David.

But in I Kings 5, we read how Solomon contracted for timbers from Hiram King of Tyre and from the Sidonians. In I Kings 5:17, notice is given that Solomon was in charge of the quarrying of the foundation stones. I Kings 5:18 indicates that Solomon was in charge of the building. All of these references relate to building activity before the laying of the foundation in the fourth year of Solomon.

David then charged Solomon in I Chronicles 22:14-16:

Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the LORD an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared; and thou mayest add thereto. Moreover there are workmen with thee in abundance, hewers and workers of stone and timber, and all manner of cunning men for every manner of work. Of the gold, the silver, and the brass, and the iron, there is no number. Arise therefore, and be doing, and the LORD be with thee.

And we read in I Chronicles 28:10:

Take heed now; for the LORD hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it.

Not only did David lay this charge upon Solomon to begin construction, but he also gave a similar charge to the leaders of the people. David commanded all the leaders of Israel to help Solomon his son. We read in I Chronicles 22:17-19:

David also commanded all the princes of Israel to help Solomon his son, saying, Is not the LORD your God with you? and hath he not given you rest on every side? for he hath given the inhabitants of the land into mine hand; and the land is subdued before the LORD, and before his people. Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God; arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the LORD God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the LORD.

The picture that emerges from the Bible is one of great activity centered around the construction of the temple. At first David, the father King, guides his young son, King Solomon, in the multitudinous preparations as well as being directly active in these preparations himself. All of this activity points to the moment when the actual construction will begin at the building site. But the laying of the foundation may not take place as long as David is living.

Then David dies, and Solomon reigns alone. The command to “arise” and “build” still rings in his ears and the ears of the people. The great moment which David, Solomon, and all Israel had eagerly anticipated arrives. Upon David’s death, no obstacle stands in the way; and the laying of the temple foundation begins. All the preparations of the past several years now become reality. After a suitable period of mourning, probably no longer than 30 days, Solomon begins to carry out David’s command to arise and build.

The Biblical account surely intimates that Solomon began to lay the foundation about 30 days after David’s death. Thus, the fourth year of Solomon’s reign, when the foundation of the temple was laid, must have coincided with the fortieth year of David’s reign. The last four years of David’s reign, during which he reigned as co-regent with Solomon, were years of preparation for temple construction. The death of David freed Solomon to lay the foundation.

Therefore, we may conclude that since Saul reigned forty years and David reigned forty years, Saul’s reign must have begun 80 years earlier than Solomon’s fourth year. Since the fourth year of Solomon’s reign was 967 B.C., 80 years earlier was the year 1047 B.C., at which time Saul became king. Thus, the year 1047 B.C. must be regarded as the year that ended the period of the judges.

We have previously determined that the Exodus occurred in 1447 B.C. We know that they entered Canaan 40 years later (Exodus 16:35, Joshua 5:6-12, Numbers 14:34, Numbers 32:13), which was the year 1407 B.C. And since, as we have just discovered, Saul began to reign in 1047 B.C., a time span of 360 years was the duration of the period of the judges.

Is a 360-year span borne out by any other Biblical information? Many scholars have felt that it is impossible to establish a precise chronology for this time because the Biblical information seems to be confused and sketchy. At first look, this does appear to be the case, but when we analyze the Bible notices more carefully, we will see that they show that the period of the judges was indeed 360 years.

The following time notices are set forth in the Bible beginning with the entrance into Canaan and ending with the last time notice before the reign of Saul.

Judges 3:8	Israel served Cushanrishathaim 8 years	8
Judges 3:11	Land had rest 40 years	40
Judges 3:14	Israel served Eglon, King of Moab 18 years	18
Judges 3:30	Land had rest for 80 years	80
Judges 4:3	Israel oppressed by Jabin, King of Canaan, 20 years	20
Judges 5:31	Land had rest for 40 years	40
Judges 6:1	Israel in hand of Midian 7 years	7
Judges 8:28	Land had rest 40 years	40
Judges 9:22	Abimelech ruled Israel 3 years	3
Judges 10:2	Tola judged Israel 23 years	23
Judges 10:3	Jair judged Israel 22 years	22
Judges 10:8	Philistines oppressed Israel 18 years	18
Judges 12:7	Jephthah judged Israel 6 years	6
Judges 12:9	Ibzan judged Israel 7 years	7
Judges 12:11	Elon judged Israel 10 years	10
Judges 12:14	Abdon judged Israel 8 years	8
Judges 13:1	Israel in hand of Philistines 40 years	40
Judges 15:20	Sampson judged Israel 20 years	20

I Samuel 4:18	Eli judged Israel 40 years	40
I Samuel 6:1	Ark was in Philistines' hands 7 months. This figure rounded off to years equals 1 year	1
I Samuel 7:2	From time ark was returned until next event a passage of 20 years took place. Since no other time notices are given until I Samuel 13:1 which speaks of the length of King Saul's reign, we must assume this 20 years ends with the beginning of Saul's reign as king	20
Total years		471

Inasmuch as 471 years is 111 years longer than the 360 years which appears to be the correct figure for this period of time, we could assume with many others who have studied this problem that some of the judges ruled as contemporaries. Since it would appear that we do not know who these judges were and when they ruled, we cannot expect to determine an exact chronology for this period of history.

The fact is, however, that a very exact chronology can be determined. If we look again at the above references, we note that there are two kinds. One describes the passage of time with respect to the land of Israel or to the rule of an Israelite judge. The other describes oppression or subjugation by a heathen power or king. If we separate the last kind from the total list, we discover a very exact chronology.

<u>Israel Chronology</u>		<u>Note on Oppression By Heathen Power</u>	
Land had rest	40 years ¹	Israel served	8 years
		Israel served Eglon	18 years
Land had rest	80 years ¹	Israel oppressed by Jabin	20 years

Land had rest	40 years ¹		
		Israel in hand of Midian	7 years
Land had rest	40 years ¹		
Abimelech rules	3 years		
Tola judged	23 years		
Jair judged	22 years		
		Philistines oppressed Israel	18 years
Jephthah judged	6 years		
Ibzan judged	7 years		
Elon judged	10 years		
Abdon judged	8 years		
		Israel in hand of Philistines	40 years
Sampson judged	20 years		
Eli judged	40 years		
Ark captured	1 year		
Final period of Samuel	20 years		
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	360 years		111 years

And 360 years agrees precisely with the period we have already established as the time span from the entrance into Canaan in 1407 B.C. until Saul became king in 1047 B.C. As we shall see, the oppression at various times adding up to 111 years really occurred during these 360 years.

We have established that as in the case of the two time bridges from Jacob to Moses, the Bible also offers two time bridges from the Exodus to Solomon. The first is the 480 years of I Kings 6:1. The second is found in the Books of Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, I Chronicles, I Kings, and Acts.

Let us now set forth this chronology in greater detail and establish some absolute dates. The Exodus occurred on Nisan 15, 1447 B.C., as we saw in Chapter 4. Joshua 5:6-12 indicates that the entrance into Canaan was exactly 40 years later which was the year 1407 B.C. The next chronological notice is that given in Judges 3:11 which declares, "And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died." This would be the period 1407-1367 B.C. At the beginning of this time the initial period of the conquest of Canaan took place; this occurred during the first seven years (Joshua 14:7-10, Deuteronomy 2:14). During this 40 year period the people served Cushanrishathaim, King of Mesopotamia, for a period of eight years (Judges 3:8). Their deliverer was Othniel, son of the younger brother of Caleb (Judges 3:9).

The next chronological notice concerning Israel is that in Judges 3:30, "So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years." This was the period from 1367 B.C. to 1287 B.C. During this period Israel served Eglon, King of Moab 18 years (Judges 3:14). Their deliverers were Ehud (Judges 3:15) and Shamgar (Judges 3:31).

The next chronological notice is that of Judges 5:31, "And the land had rest forty years." This was the period from 1287 B.C. to 1247 B.C. During this period Israel was oppressed by Jabin, King of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor and oppressed the Israelites for 20 years (Judges 4:3). Israel's deliverers were Deborah and Barak (Judges 4 and 5).

The next notice is found in Judges 8:28, "And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon." This was the period from 1247 B.C. to 1207 B.C. Near the beginning of this period Israel was given into the hands of Midian for seven years (Judges 6:1). Their deliverer was Gideon. His death in 1207 B.C. ended this period. This is a very important date in our study, as we shall see later.

Abimelech, a son of Gideon by a concubine (Judges 8:31), reigned as king for three years (Judges 9:22). This was the period from 1207 B.C. to 1204 B.C. To ensure his reign, he killed his 70 brothers

(Judges 9:5). He was killed by a millstone dropped upon him by a woman (Judges 9:53). Abimelech's evil and short-lived kingship was followed by the judgeship of Tola who judged Israel 23 years, from 1204 B.C. to 1181 B.C. (Judges 10:1-2).

After Tola came Jair the Gileadite, who judged Israel 22 years (Judges 10:3), 1181 B.C. to 1159 B.C. Apparently during this period Israel was oppressed for 18 years by the Philistines and the Ammonites (Judges 10:7-8).

Jair was followed by four judges who ruled successively.

Jephthah	6 years	(Judges 12:7),	1159-1153 B.C.
Ibzan	7 years	(Judges 12:9),	1153-1146 B.C.
Elon	10 years	(Judges 12:11),	1146-1136 B.C.
Abdon	8 years	(Judges 12:14),	1136-1128 B.C.

The next chronological notice is that of Judges 15:20, where we read that Samson judged Israel 20 years, 1128 B.C. to 1108 B.C. We read in Judges 13:1 that during this time in Israel's experiences, "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years." This oppression probably began during the time of the judges Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. Samson's birth was predicted to his mother, and she was told that her son would begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines who were probably their oppressors at that time (Judges 13:5).

For our next chronological notice, we must leave the Book of Judges which closes with no more information of this nature and go to the Book of I Samuel. We read in I Samuel 4:18 that Eli had judged Israel 40 years. This was the period from 1108 to 1068 B.C. The Bible gives us sufficient information about Eli and his contemporaries that we are able to insert a few bits of interesting information into our study. These are interesting but not in themselves important to our study. We know, for example, that since Eli was 98 years old at death, he was born in the days of Jair, possibly even before Samson's birth. He must have been priest in Shiloh at the time Samson was judge. He is first introduced in the Bible as a priest in I Samuel 1, when Hannah came to the temple at Shiloh to pray. Eli could well have been fifty or more at the time Samuel was born inasmuch as Eli's two sons already officiated as priests (I Samuel 1:3). He became official judge of the land at the age of 58. This was probably about the time Samuel came

to the temple as a weaned child for it is reported that Samuel was an old man at the time Saul became king (I Samuel 8:5). We shall see that Saul became king about 60 years after Eli became judge. Eli's judgeship came to a tragic end when the Philistines routed the Israelites, killed his two sons, and captured the ark. The news of the captured ark was the tidings that resulted in Eli's death (I Samuel 4:18).

Returning to the chronological sequence, we next discover that the ark was in the hands of the Philistines seven months (I Samuel 6:11). This was seven months of the year 1068 B.C. or seven months beginning the later part of 1068 B.C. and continuing in the early part of 1067 B.C. For our chronological sequence, all other notices from the entrance into Canaan until David are given in years only. Therefore, we may round off this seven months period to one year, 1068-1067 B.C., to follow the pattern established by the previous chronological notices.

In I Samuel 7:2, we read the final chronological notice. The ark was returned to Israel at Kirjathjearim at the end of the seven months period. In this verse we read that 20 years passed after this event:

And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjathjearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

Since the next major event in Israel's history is the selection of Saul to be king, and the beginning of his reign is the next Biblical chronological notice (I Samuel 13:1), we can conclude that this 20 years was the period when Samuel judged Israel. His judgeship, of course, ended when Saul became king. This 20-year period is 1067 B.C. to 1047 B.C. The 40 year reign of Saul continued then from 1047 B.C. to 1007 B.C. when David came to the throne. David's 40 year reign covered the period 1007 B.C. to 967 B.C. In the year 967 B.C., David died and the foundation of the temple was laid as we determined earlier in this chapter.

Thus, we have seen again how the Scriptural record provides precise and adequate information to permit an exact chronology, even through the troubled period of the judges.

Jephthah's Estimate of Time

Two other statements are found in the Bible that relate to the period of the judges. Let us briefly examine these to determine how

they relate to the chronology we have now established. The first is a statement in Judges 11:26 where we read that the judge Jephthah declared that the Israelites dwelt in Heshbon, Aroer, and the cities on the banks of the Arnon, three hundred years. Since we know he was judge from 1159 B.C. to 1153 B.C., we can see that 300 years was a very good estimate of time. Three hundred years earlier than 1153 B.C. is 1453 B.C. The Israelites were in the wilderness sojourn while they dwelt in Heshbon (Numbers 32:37) and dwelt in the valley of Arnon (Deuteronomy 3:12). Since they dwelt in these cities during their wilderness sojourn (although near the end of the sojourn), and since the wilderness sojourn began in 1447 B.C., Jephthah's statement of 300 years was a good estimate.

Paul's Estimate of Time

The second reference which relates to the period of the Judges is Acts 13:19-20:

And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance, for about four hundred and fifty years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel, the prophet.

Literally, these verses say, "and having destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan gave as an inheritance the land of them about four hundred and fifty years. And after these things He gave judges until Samuel a prophet."

From this notice, we gather that a period of about 450 years transpired from the time that Canaan was given as an inheritance to Israel until Solomon's reign ended. This is because at the end of Solomon's reign, Israel was shattered into two nations and the land was no longer an inheritance enjoyed by the whole nation of Israel as a cohesive unit. They were given the land at the time Canaan was subdued by Joshua.

We shall see that Paul's estimate of about 450 years was a valid approximation. To check it we must first discover when Canaan was subdued. We find in Joshua 24:11 that after Joshua had divided the land, he declared:

And ye went over Jordan, and came unto Jericho: and the men of Jericho fought against you, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I delivered them into your hand.

These are the same seven nations recorded in Deuteronomy 7:1-2 which God predicted would be defeated under God's leadership. Therefore, they must be the nations to which Paul refers when he speaks of seven nations having been destroyed in the land of Canaan. How can we determine when Joshua spoke of the fact that they had been defeated? We know it was before Joshua's death, when he was old and advanced in years (Joshua 23:1). He had just divided the land of Canaan amongst the tribes, giving each tribe a part of the land as an inheritance. This is discussed at length in the Book of Joshua beginning with Chapter 13. Joshua 13:1 also says that he was old and advanced in years.

We find clues concerning the timing of the division of the inheritance when Joshua was old in Joshua 14:7 and Joshua 14:10. In Joshua 14:7 Caleb says:

Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadeshbarnea to spy out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in mine heart.

And in verse 10 he says:

And now, behold, the LORD hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the LORD spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old.

Then from Deuteronomy 2:14 we discover that Israel continued in the wilderness 38 years after Kadeshbarnea. Since Caleb spoke his words 45 years (85 minus 40) after Kadeshbarnea, he spoke seven years after Israel entered Canaan. Since they entered Canaan in 1407 B.C., these words of Caleb were uttered 1400 B.C. We may conclude that the beginning of the time, spoken of by Paul in Acts 13:19, "And when he [God] had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot," is about the same time that Caleb spoke in Joshua 14. This was about 1400 B.C. We also know that the year of Solomon's death was 931 B.C., 469 years later. Thus, we see that Paul was correct when he spoke of 450 years.

Summary

We began this chapter by making reference to I Kings 6:1 where the Bible declares that there were 480 years from the Exodus to the time of the laying of the foundation of Solomon's temple. We have

discovered that this is in exact accord with the chronology of the period of the judges. The Exodus occurred in 1447 B.C. The foundation of the temple was laid 480 years later, in 967 B.C. A recapitulation of this 480-year period, as we have determined by Biblical reckoning, is outlined as follows.

Chronology of the Judges

The Exodus	1447 B.C.
Entrance into Canaan	1407 B.C.
Initial 40 year period in Canaan During this period the conquest of Canaan occurred under Joshua and Othniel delivered Israel	1407-1367 B.C.
Next 80-year period in Canaan During this period Ehud and Shamgar delivered Israel	1367-1287 B.C.
Next 40 year period in Canaan Deborah and Barak were deliverers during this period	1287-1247 B.C.
Gideon judged	1247-1207 B.C.
Abimelech ruled	1207-1204 B.C.
Tola judged	1204-1181 B.C.
Jair judged	1181-1159 B.C.
Jephthah judged	1159-1153 B.C.
Ibzan judged	1153-1146 B.C.
Elon judged	1146-1136 B.C.
Abdon judged	1136-1128 B.C.

Samson judged	1128-1108 B.C.
Eli judged	1108-1068 B.C.
Ark in Philistines' hands	1068-1067 B.C.
Samuel judged	1067-1047 B.C.
Saul reigned as king	1047-1007 B.C.
David reigned	1007-967 B.C.
Solomon reigned	971-931 B.C.
Foundation of temple laid in fourth year of Solomon's reign	967 B.C.

NOTES:

¹ See Appendix II concerning the apparent inconsistency of the declaration “the land had rest . . . years” with the fact that the conquest of Canaan took place during this first 40-year period of rest. Moreover, during the entire 200 year period when it is recorded that the land had rest there were repeated oppressions during which there could not have been real rest in the land.

Chapter 6

The Tower of Babel

The absolute chronology of man presented in this volume should be of help and interest to all who are concerned with the history of man and this world. Any thinking person surely wonders, however, how this chronology relates to the evidence produced by secular sources. Much of the secular evidence concerns events in historical time (history since the beginning of writing).

By comparing written evidence from many early civilizations, scholars have arrived at a chronology of man in historical times that appears accurate from within margins as small as ten years to as great as a few hundred years, depending upon the antiquity and nature of the evidence. If, as we shall see, the early writings made reference to astronomical events, it has been possible to date historical events within a few years or at most a few decades. This kind of evidence is rare indeed; but it has been possible to date many events written in ancient records, such as lists of kings, with reasonable accuracy by relating them to the points in time that were established by astronomical notices. Let us briefly look at the evidence and conclusions offered by secular sources and compare them with the Biblical chronology.

The First Civilization

Both archaeological and Biblical evidence support the conclusion that the earliest civilizations were located in the present nation of Iraq.

Albright writes:

Archaeological research has established that there is no focus of civilization in the earth that can begin to compete in antiquity and activity with the basin of the Eastern Mediterranean and the region immediately to the east of it . . . The Obeidan is the earliest clearly defined culture of Babylonia, where we find its remains

underlying nearly all of the oldest cities of the country such as Ur, Erech, Lagash, Eridu, etc. This proves that the occupation of the marshlands of Babylonia by human settlers came rather late in history of the irrigation culture, probably not far from 3700 B.C.¹

Thus, the archaeological evidence shows that the location of the first civilization after the flood was in the Mesopotamia Valley. This information agrees exactly with the Bible which reports that the first cities were Babylon, Erech, Nineveh, etc. (Genesis 10:10-11).

Conclusions based on archaeological evidence and on Biblical evidence also agree on the date of the earliest civilizations. The date of 3700 B.C. suggested by Albright for the beginning of the earliest city civilization is apparently satisfactory to most archaeologists. M. B. Rowton writes that in Uruk, one of the most ancient Mesopotamia sites, the earliest level of monumental buildings is that of the level known as Uruk V. He concludes "the beginning of Uruk V can plausibly be dated at 3500 B.C."² The dates 3500 or 3700 B.C. are estimates arrived at by starting at a more clearly defined historical point and allowing a reasonable period of time for each level of prior occupation. Thus, the archaeological evidence appears to indicate that prior to about 3700 B.C., there was no substantial culture anywhere in the world. The period prior to the time of writing is known as the Prehistoric Age or the Stone Age. About 3700-3500 B.C., the first great civilization began to be formed in the plains of Sumer in the land of Babylon, Erech, Ur, etc.

Evidences have been found of ancient nomadic tribes that appear to have existed earlier than 3700 B.C. There is also evidence that a city such as Jericho could be as old as 10,000 years. These evidences, however, do not point to a culture or a civilization that even remotely could have been as important as ancient Babylonia. It might be noted, too, that the dating of archaeological evidence prior to about 3500 B.C. is almost completely dependent upon carbon 14 dating. It can be shown that carbon 14 dating becomes quite undependable when used for dating organisms older than 4000 years. Thus, there is great reason to believe that a carbon 14 date of 10,000 years shows an actual age more on the order of 6000 years.³

Turning now to the Biblical evidence, we discover that the first notice of building activity after the flood is that of Nimrod, whose kingdom began with Babel, Erech, and Accad, all in the land of Shinar (Genesis 10:10). But when did Nimrod come upon the scene? His

genealogical descent is that of Noah, Ham, Cush, and Nimrod (Genesis 10:1, 6, 8). The Bible offers no timetable for this side of the family tree but it does offer precise information regarding another branch, that of Noah, Shem, Arpachshad, and Shelah. When we study the genealogical statements of the Bible we note that very often two branches of the tree are offered. One is of the descendants who lead eventually to Christ, about which precise timetables are given. The second is the genealogical descent of that side of the family which turned away from God. Thus, between Adam and Noah the Bible records ten generations beginning with Adam and Seth and ending with Lamech and Noah, a period of about 6000 years, as we have seen. However, simultaneously, a genealogy comprised of some eight generations is recorded in Genesis 4. This descent is that which comes through Cain and includes those who were the mighty in the land or the sons of men rather than the sons of God. Each generation on Cain's side of the family tree appears to be closely parallel to the generations through Seth.

The parallel character of the sons on God's side with those on man's side is emphasized by information concerning later generations. Ishmael, the ancestor of the Arabs, became the father of twelve princes (Genesis 25:16), but so did his half brother Isaac through his son Jacob. The twin boys, Esau and Jacob, again established the two lines. Jacob lived to be 147 years of age and became the forerunner of a great nation. Esau's death age is not given but he was 120 when he and Jacob buried father Isaac (Genesis 25:26, 35:29); so he, too, lived to a ripe old age and became the father of an important nation, the nation of Edom.

Therefore, we may reasonably conclude that Ham and Shem, being brothers, were obviously contemporaries, that Arpachshad and Cush were nearly contemporaries, and that Shelah and Nimrod were probably men of the same period of history. Thus, if we know Shelah's date, we can surmise that Nimrod's was close to the same date. We are interested in Nimrod because the Biblical history indicates that he was the founder of the civilization of what is now Iraq or what was then the plains of Shinar or Sumer or Mesopotamia.

As we saw in Chapter 4, Shelah's date was 4050 B.C. to 3617 B.C., and Nimrod must have lived about this time. The Bible suggests a date of from 4050 to 3617 for the founding of the great cities of the Mesopotamia Valley. Thus, the date suggested by archaeology evidence (3700-3500) accords very well with the Biblical statement.

It is of more than passing interest in this connection that the name Nimrod has left its mark on the Mesopotamia Valley. The great archaeologist George Rawlinson writes:

The remarkable ruin generally called Ahkerhuf, which lies a little to the south-west of Baghdad, is known to many as the “Tel-Nimrud;” the great dam across the Tigris below Mosul is the “Suhr-el-Nimrud,” one of the chief of the buried cities in the same neighborhood is called “Nimrud” simply; and the name of “Birs-Nimrud” attaches to the grandest mass of ruins in the lower country.⁴

We may now begin to see how the secular record helps us to inquire in greater detail regarding the accurate but sometimes sketchy facts offered in the Bible.

The Confusion of Tongues

The next bit of history that should be interesting to investigate is the Tower of Babel. Is there any secular evidence that relates to the account of this confusion of tongues as set forth in Genesis 11? There is indeed, as we shall see.

First of all, we might note that the account of Genesis 11 indicates that prior to this time in history, all men spoke one language. Moreover, the leading civilization was located in the plains of Shinar or Sumer. The citizens of these plains desired to be the one great civilization of the world, which prompted the building of the great tower. This in turn brought God’s judgment upon the people so that they were separated into various nations.

The time of the beginning of the second important civilization of antiquity also would have real significance. We would expect it to be after the Tower of Babel. We know that the event of the Tower of Babel occurred during the generation of Peleg; we read in Genesis 10:25, “And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided.” The Bible does not conclusively identify the phrase “the earth divided” with the Tower of Babel. However, most theologians do make this identification. Actually, it might have reference in addition to the physical division of continental masses.⁵

We have determined that Peleg’s generation was from 3153 B.C. to 2914 B.C. so this would be the time of Tower of Babel. Therefore,

we would expect no civilizations other than Babylonia to have an antiquity greater than about 3150 B.C.

All archaeological evidence points to Egypt as the second great civilization to appear. While there was a primitive culture in Egypt prior to the First Dynasty, the uniting of all of Egypt under Pharaoh Menes to form the First Dynasty was the signal for a major burst in the arts of civilization. Albright writes:

It is now certain that the level of Egyptian culture remained considerably below that of Mesopotamia until the First Dynasty, when under strong indirect influence from the Euphrates Valley it forged ahead of the latter in a breath-taking spurt.⁶

Interestingly, the new civilization of Egypt beginning with the First Dynasty was patterned after the Babylonian (Mesopotamia) culture. Albright continues:

The close of the Predynastic Age and the beginning of the Thinite (period of first two dynasties)⁷ period witnessed a sudden burst in the arts of civilization. This seems to have been connected in some way with an increase of cultural influence from Asia, since there are numerous exact parallels between Mesopotamia and Egyptian culture at this time, the former being demonstrably older and more original in nearly every instance.⁸

The date of the beginning of the First Dynasty under Menes is calculated to be somewhere between 2800 B.C. and 3100 B.C. Early archaeologists such as Breasted dated his reign at about 3400 B.C. As new archaeological evidence was uncovered, this date was moved forward to about 3000 B.C. Albright believes 2850 B.C. is a good estimate.⁹ William C. Hayes suggests 3100 B.C. is the best date presently available.¹⁰

When we consider the above information we are struck by the fact that prior to about 3100 B.C. to 2850 B.C., only one civilization of consequence existed in the world. That was the nation of Babylonia on the plains of Shinar. At that time in a sudden burst of progress Egypt grew to become a second great civilization, a civilization patterned after the first civilization. These dates are in almost exact agreement with the Biblical date for the Tower of Babel. Surely, the confusion of tongues as recorded in Genesis 11 sent thousands of people, skilled in all the arts and crafts of Mesopotamia, to Egypt and elsewhere. Thus, we see agreement between the sacred and the secular records through this indirect evidence of the timetable of the civilizations of antiquity.

Writing: A Result of Babel

Another great historical achievement, the beginning of writing, was at about the same time in history, and it, too, may be related to the confusion of tongues. The Mesopotamia Valley was the birth place of the first important civilization, and it was also the birth place of writing. Wooley writes:

All the archaeological evidence available seems to prove that true writing was first developed in southern Mesopotamia; and in view of the incalculable importance of the invention for human progress everywhere we are entitled to ask the further question, why was that invention made by the Sumerians rather than any other ancient people?¹¹

He continues:

It is not possible to trace the development of writing in Egypt with the same detail as in Sumer . . .; the simple but sufficient reason for this is that the Egyptians took over the principle of writing ready-made from the Sumerians.¹²

Although it cannot be proven conclusively, the early Sumerian writing probably became the foundation for all other systems of writing. Albright states:

Sumero-Accadian cuneiform was also used to write many other languages, Hittite (nasion or Nasion Horite), (Hurrian) Urartian (in Armenia), Cossean, and Elomite. It was further used occasionally for a number of known languages, such as Indo-Iranian, Canaanite (Hebrew), Egyptian, Aramic.¹³

Wooley declares:

The earliest examples of the Indus Valley script that have yet been found date to about the twenty-fourth century B.C. . . . that India owed its art of writing to the Sumerians cannot be proved, but it is highly probable.¹⁴

He states further:

On the whole it is more probable that the Chinese derived from Sumer the principle of writing.¹⁵

The timing of the beginning of writing could be highly significant. Archaeologists vary in their estimates as to when man first began to write. Some choose a date as early as 3500 B.C., although the oldest cuneiform documents that easily can be read must be dated

2800 B.C.¹⁶ In the light of the paucity of tablets dating earlier than 2800 B.C., many archaeologists believe writing began several hundred years later than 3500 B.C. or about 3000 B.C. Gelb writes:

The span of over one thousand years between the beginning of Sumerian writing at the start of the fourth millennium and the establishment of full writing around 2500 B.C., postulated by the high chronologists, has always seemed to me out of proportion with the realities of the Sumerian epigraphy. For that reason I have felt rather in sympathy with the low chronologists who proposed to reduce this span to about 400 to 500 years . . . the date of the earliest Sumerian writing should be set tentatively at about 3100 B.C.¹⁷

Perhaps many archaeologists guess at 3500 B.C. as a beginning point because it is also the approximate time when the Sumerians became a cohesive civilization. Gelb's conclusion, however, could be the more accurate.

The confusion of tongues in Sumer sometime between 3150-2900 B.C. could well have been the catalyst that produced writing. Before this dramatic, civilization-splitting event, all was secure. Only one language was spoken in all the world. Verbal communication was adequate and dependable. But then came a fearful event that shook the very foundations of that great civilization. Men could no longer understand each other. The application of the spoken word to clay tablets would provide insurance that this kind of happening would never destroy a culture again. The clay tablets would always prove to be a reference point. Surely we can see the possibility if not the probability of the connection between writing and the Tower of Babel.

The Ziggurats

One other bit of evidence seems to support the Biblical account of the Tower of Babel. Abundant evidence is available in the secular record regarding great temple towers, the ruins of which are found in many of the ancient cities of Mesopotamia. These huge structures called "ziggurats" could well be patterned after the original structure called in the Bible "the tower of Babel." One of the largest has been written about extensively. It was located in Babylon but only the bare outline of its foundations can still be seen. James MacQueen writes:

In an isolated position immediately opposite the main gate, but towards the west of the courtyard, stood the ziggurat or temple tower of Babylon. This mighty building, rising to a height of almost 300 feet, must have been a dominant feature of the Babylonian landscape, and certainly accounts for the Biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel. Only the ground plan was recovered by excavation, and there has been a great deal of scholarly argument on the details of the upper portion, but thanks to descriptions given by Herodotus and in contemporary inscriptions, the general shape of the building is clear. The tower was square in plan, and rose, probably in eight stages, to a temple at the summit. The lowest stage was 300 feet square and about 108 feet high, the second 256 feet square and 60 feet high. The third, fourth, and fifth stories were each about 20 feet high, with sides of 197 feet, 167 feet, and 138 feet. The size and shape of the sixth, seventh, and eighth stories are disputed, but it seems most probable that the sixth was 108 feet square and 20 feet high, while the seventh stage, 50 feet high, was no longer square but rectangular, measuring probably 79 feet by 69 feet. On top of this may have been a small “wardroom,” the dimensions of which are not known, forming an eighth story. . . . The whole of this structure was apparently faced with baked bricks over a core of unbaked bricks. The core of the first stage was 200 feet square, while the facing on all sides was 50 feet thick, and finished with the usual recesses between flat “towers.” The upper stories may also have been finished in this way, but this is not certain.¹⁸

This great temple tower, also known as Etemenanki, “the House of the Foundation Platform of Heaven and Earth,” could well have been constructed about 3100 B.C., which is the approximate Biblical date of the Tower of Babel.

In this connection there appears to be two interesting facts. The first is related to an ancient tablet which makes a rather provocative statement. In the book *Bible and Spade* the author states:

George Smith also quotes a remarkable fragment relating to the collapse of such a ziggurat. “The building of this temple offended the gods. In a night they threw down what had been built. They scattered them abroad, and made strange their speech. The progress they impeded.”¹⁹

The Bible makes no reference to the destruction of the city and tower stating only that “they left off building the city” (Genesis 11:8). That a physical disaster accompanied the confusion of tongues is, of course, a distinct possibility since the earth was divided during Peleg’s generation (Genesis 10:25), and, as we shall see in Chapter 14, a physical division of earth-shattering proportions could have accompanied the confusion of tongues.

The second interesting and perhaps significant fact relative to the Tower of Babel is a curious change in the construction of bricks. Wooley speaks of this:

The Sumerians, and the Babylonians after them, achieved a mastery of brick-building technique so complete that they had no need to look for any other material. A few early experiments, such as that of moulding bricks in cement, were never followed up. It is true that the size of bricks changed in different periods, but the changes were generally quite small, practically all the varieties coming within the limits of $11\frac{3}{4}$ inches to $13\frac{3}{4}$ inches square. The only serious departure from the norm is one that archaeologists have found difficult to explain. With the beginning of the Early Dynastic period the ordinary flat brick is suddenly and uniformly replaced by the “plano-convex” type—a brick rectangular in plan but rounded on the top like a bun—which continues in use for several centuries. It is a clumsy brick, unhandy for laying and requiring much more mortar than does a flat brick, and there is no practical justification for it. It has been suggested that it was introduced by newcomers to Sumer who in their own country had been accustomed to building in stone and so moulded bricks in the form of pebbles; but builders in stone prefer flat flakes to rounded pebbles, and no new people came into Sumer at the beginning of the Early Dynastic period. It is possible that the reason for the change was not technical but sentimental. During the Jamdat Nasr period Sumer had been ruled by foreign interlopers, and their regime seems to come to a violent end brought about by a nationalist revolt. The Jamdat Nasr people had been great builders, and the first act of the new governments was to destroy their buildings and set up new ones; for these ‘plano-convex’ bricks were used, for the first time, and perhaps they symbolized the complete break with the immediate past. Certain it is that long after practical considerations had brought the flat brick back into favour with builders a superstitious reverence was still attached to the bun-shape type.²⁰

The Early Dynastic period spoken of by Dr. Wooley was a period in history that began about 3000 B.C. Could the awe-inspiring events of Genesis 11 have occasioned possible superstitions in regards to the forming of the bricks? The Bible does make reference to making bricks in connection with the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:3). The archaeologists' discoveries that there was a significant change in the art of brick making, that it continued for several centuries, and that this change occurred at a time simultaneous with the Biblical chronology of the Tower of Babel surely would seem more than coincidental. The Bible says simply in Genesis 11:8:

So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

The superstitious dread that filled these builders as a result of God's dramatic intervention in their building project could well have induced such a construction change.

We have seen that when we reach back in secular history as far as written records will allow, and even further by use of artifacts and other data, there is wonderful synchronization with the Biblical chronology. We have seen that a number of archaeological discoveries are in startling agreement with the Bible chronology. Not only were the first great city civilizations discovered in Mesopotamia, as the Bible declares, but many of these ancient ruins bore the name Nimrod, the Biblical builder of these ancient cities. Moreover, the archaeological date 3700-3500 B.C. for the beginnings of these great cities agrees very closely with the Biblical date.

When we considered the Tower of Babel, we saw that a number of important archaeological discoveries relate directly to the Tower of Babel and the confusion of tongues that followed it. If concordance of the archaeological record is found with that of Biblical statements to a point 2000 years before Moses, it seems probable that the sacred record must be accurate history all the way back to creation. If the sacred record can be read as history back to the days of Nimrod, we surely should be able to read it as history back to the days of Adam.

The Maya Connection

An interesting time correlation is found in secular records in connection with the Maya civilization that existed hundreds of years ago in Central America. Dr. Howard LaFay wrote in *National Geographic Magazine*:

... the Maya practiced an astronomy so precise that their ancient calendar was as accurate as the one we employ today; they plotted the courses of celestial bodies, and to the awe of the faithful, their priests predicted both solar and lunar eclipses. They calculated the path of Venus -- an elusive planet that is by turn a morning and evening star -- with an error of only 14 seconds a year. The Maya originated a complex system of writing and pioneered the mathematical concept of zero.²¹

The Maya produced square or rectangular elements called glyph blocks, which made up separate units of an inscription. These inscriptions were frequently calendars and were found on stelae and monumental buildings such as temples. Archaeologists have correlated the Maya calendar with our calendar to the extent that precise dates recorded in the Maya writings can be expressed in terms of our calendar. The curious thing is that these calendars frequently included a foundation date. Dr. George E. Stuart writes:

... the beginning of the Maya calendar, a date that most Mayanists agree corresponds to our own August 11, 3114 B.C. What, one can only wonder, was the high significance of that day, long before Maya history began? ²²

Archaeologists who study the ancient civilization of Maya puzzle about the date 3114 B.C., but the Bible gives the answer.

Significantly, the Bible indicates Peleg's period was from 3153 to 2914 B.C., so that Peleg would have been 49 years of age in the year 3114 B.C., the beginning year of the Maya calendar. The Bible records that it was during Peleg's period that the earth was divided. Genesis 10:25:

And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided; and his brother's name was Joktan.

The division of the continents occurred, therefore, during Peleg's lifetime. Most people of that day would have lived in one part of the huge continent that existed until the time of Peleg; however, some individuals would have lived in that part of the original continent which became Central America.

This was a gigantic event; the division of the original continent was equivalent to the beginning of time for these nomads. The awful event of part of the continent moving across the ocean floor and the resultant mountain building must have been absolutely astounding

and catastrophic to the progenitors of the Maya people. It is not surprising that in their calendar they placed a foundation date; it is not surprising that the date precisely equates with the Biblical statement that in the days of Peleg the earth was divided.

NOTES:

¹ William Foxwell Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1957, p. 32.

² M. B. Rowton, *On The Cambridge Ancient History*, Cambridge University Press, 1964, pp. 57-58.

³ See Chapter 12 for an examination of this dating method.

⁴ George Rawlinson, *Egypt and Babylon*, New York, John W. Lovell Co., 1885, p. 9.

⁵ This subject is beyond the scope of this discussion and will be treated in Chapter 14.

⁶ William Foxwell Albright, *From Stone Age to Christianity*. Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1957. p. 142.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁰ William C. Hayes. "Chronology: Egypt, Western Asia, Aegean Bronze Age," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Cambridge University Press, 1964, p. 4.

¹¹ Wooley, Sir Leonard. *The Beginnings of Civilization*; The New York American Library, 1965, p. 364.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 378.

¹³ Albright, *From Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 36.

¹⁴ Wooley, *The Beginnings of Civilization*, p. 374.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

¹⁶ Albright, *From Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 147.

¹⁷ Ignace J. Gelb, *A Study of Writing*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1952, p. 63.

¹⁸ James G. MacQueen, *Babylon*, Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1964, p. 174.

¹⁹ Stephen L. Gaiger, *Bible and Spade*, Oxford University, University Press, 1936, p. 29.

²⁰ Wooley, *The Beginnings of Civilization*, p. 262.

²¹ Dr. Howard LaFay, "The Maya, Children of Time," in *National Geographic Magazine*, December, 1976, p. 729.

²² Dr. George E. Stuart, "The Maya Riddle of the Glyphs," in *National Geographic Magazine*, December, 1976, p. 779.

Chapter 7

Joseph and Pharaoh

We have looked briefly at the secular records which relate to the earliest historical events following the flood. We have seen that the pages of the archaeologist and historian do give considerable information that relates to the formation of the first great civilization, on the plains of Shinar. This information has been shown to be in close agreement with the Biblical record of the dispersal of that civilization by God's intervention with the confusion of tongues. But there are other points of contact between the Scriptures and the secular pages.

The next great event in the Bible is the call of Abram from Ur of the Chaldees, which is followed by the detailed record of the patriarchal experiences of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Is there contact between the events of the lives of these men and the secular record? We know from the Biblical chronology that Sodom and Gomorrah and the other cities in the area of what is now the Dead Sea were destroyed when Abraham was 99 years old (Genesis 17, 18), in the year 2068 B.C. The secular record indicates that about 2000-2300 B.C. there was an abrupt end of civilization in this area. Albright writes:

The great site of Bab-ed-Dra on the Dead Sea probably belongs to the age of Sodom and Gomorrah; its remains date from about the last third of the third millennium, when occupation came to an abrupt close.¹

The archaeologist Nelson Glueck, who made a thorough survey of the Southern Transjordan east and south of the Dead Sea, discovered that in about the 20th or 19th centuries B.C., these villages were abandoned for some mysterious reason. These finds agree with the Biblical record that prior to 2068 B.C., the whole area was a flourishing valley like the garden of the Lord in Scripture (Genesis 19:24-28). Therefore, we see chronological synchronization in this event.

Is there more precise correlation between the secular and sacred records? When we turn to the history of Joseph, we discover a point of contact between the two records that is far more definitive. Joseph lived in Egypt in the first year of one of the greatest of the pharaohs of the Twelfth Egyptian Dynasty, which is also known as the Middle Kingdom. The year of the accession of this Pharaoh, Sesostris III, can be calculated from astronomical data. When we compare his accession year with the Biblical record, we discover identical concordance with the Biblical chronology.

The Secular Records Date

Let us first discover the accession year of Sesostris III by means of the astronomical and archaeological evidence.

A tablet has been discovered from the reign of Sesostris III that indicates that in the seventh year of his reign there was a Sothis festival on the sixteenth day of the eighth month. The festival celebrated a heliacal rising (simultaneous with the sun) of the star Sothis (Sirius).² This gives us a time clue, for a heliacal rising of Sirius occurs on any particular day of the year once every 1460 years. Dr. Jack Finegan records that in A.D. 139, a celebration occurred on the first day of the first month (the month Troth) commemorating such a rising.³ Since it took 1460 years for the festival to pass through the Egyptian calendar to come again to the same day and month, the previous time when the Sothic Festival was celebrated on the first day of the first month would have been 1322 B.C. on July 20. Jack Finegan arrives at a date of 1321 B.C. as does Breasted. The conclusion of 1321 appears to be in error by one year, apparently due to a lack of consideration of the fact that there is a loss of one year in going from B.C. to A.D. G. H. Wheeler,⁴ however, arrives at a date of 1322 B.C., as we have calculated.

Since Sesostris III commemorated a Sothic rising on the 16th day of the eighth month, we can work backward from July 20, 1322 B.C., to discover the year when this celebration occurred. There are 140 days between Thoth 1 (July 20) and the sixteenth day of the eighth month. Since the Sothic rising shifts one day each four years, we can multiply this 140 days by four to give 560 as the number of years earlier than 1322 when the festival was held during the seventh year of the reign of Sesostris III. Consequently it was the year (1322 + 560) or 1882 B.C. when the recorded festival was held. Since this was the seventh year of Sesostris III, his first year was 1888 B.C.

The Biblical Records Date

Let us see if we can find information in the Bible that could possibly relate to the first or accession year of Sesostris III. When we study the experiences of Joseph we do find the desired facts. The clue that supplies the answer is found in Genesis 41:13 which reads as follows:

And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged.

The background to this verse is as follows: Joseph was cast into prison because of his refusal to sin with Potiphar's wife. There he correctly interpreted the dreams of the chief butler and the chief baker.

The dream revealed that in three days the butler was to be restored to the butlership and the baker was to be taken from prison and hanged. These events actually took place on the third day when pharaoh gave a birthday feast. Joseph's request to the butler was that he would remember him to the pharaoh (Genesis 40:14). Chapter 40 closes with the information that the chief butler forgot about Joseph. Then two whole years passed (Genesis 41:1), after which pharaoh had his dream of the seven fat and skinny cows and the seven plump and thin ears of corn. Finally, because pharaoh was seeking for an explanation to his dream, the butler remembered poor Joseph in the dungeon. His speech to pharaoh is very significant. Genesis 41:9-13:

Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day: Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard's house, both me and the chief baker: And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream. And there was there with us a young man, an Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret. And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged.

The Pronoun “He” Conveys Significant Information

In Genesis 41, verse 9, we read that the chief butler, who had been freed from prison two years earlier, was talking to pharaoh and said that pharaoh (verse 10), had put both the butler and the baker into

prison when pharaoh was angry. To speak directly to pharaoh as he does in verse 10, using the proper name or title “pharaoh” rather than a personal pronoun “you” was very common. For example, Moses used this type of address in Exodus 8:29, where we read:

And Moses said, Behold, I go out from thee, and I will intreat the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, to morrow: but let not Pharaoh deal deceitfully any more in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.

Verse 13 of Genesis 41, however, presents a very difficult problem. When Moses was speaking to pharaoh about pharaoh, he either used his formal title “pharaoh” or he used the personal pronoun “you” (Exodus 8:9, 8:29). But never did Moses use the third person pronoun “he,” as the butler did when he was talking to pharaoh in verse 13. In fact, it makes no sense at all for the butler to talk to pharaoh about what he, the pharaoh, had done years before and then use the pronoun “he” as it is used in this passage, that is, unless the pharaoh who put the baker and butler in jail was a different pharaoh and not the one the butler was addressing in Genesis 41:9-13. If the pharaoh of Chapter 40 was the father of the pharaoh of Chapter 41, then the speech of the butler in Genesis 41:9-13 would make sense. Pharaoh (your father) put us in prison. He restored me and hanged the baker. This could happen only if there was a change in pharaohs between the time the butler was released from prison and the pharaoh’s dream two years later. This must have been the true state of affairs.

Since the Biblical account indicates this change in rulers, let us determine the Biblical timetable for this event. When we look at the Biblical chronology we discover that Jacob and his family entered Egypt 1877 B.C.⁵ This is in the second year of the famine (Genesis 45:6) which followed seven years of plenty as prophesied by Joseph. Since the seven years of plenty began virtually immediately following the interpretation of the dream (Genesis 41:32), the butler was speaking to the pharaoh nine years earlier than 1877 B.C. or 1886 B.C. Since the butler was let out of prison two whole years earlier than this, he must have been restored to office in the year 1888 B.C. Therefore, either in 1888, shortly after the pharaoh’s birthday feast, or in 1887 or early in 1886, the pharaoh who put the butler in prison died and his son ascended the throne.

We have discovered from the Biblical data that a pharaoh began to reign probably in the year 1888 B.C.⁶ He is the pharaoh who two years later made Joseph prime minister over Egypt. We also have discovered that the archaeological record indicates that a great pharaoh of the 12th Dynasty of Egypt named Sesostriis III came to power in 1888 B.C. Thus, we can know that the pharaoh who elevated Joseph to power could only have been Sesostriis III. How marvelous that, because of the Bible's precise and accurate use of the pronoun "he," in Genesis 41:13, we are able to discover this synchronization between the sacred and secular records.

Was the Father of Sesostriis III Murdered?

There is further evidence to indicate that there was a change of Egyptian kings soon before Joseph was freed from prison. The archaeological record indicates Sesostriis II, the father of Sesostriis III, in all probability reigned 19 years.⁷ His father, Amenemhet II, reigned 35 years and his grandfather, Sesostriis I, reigned 45 years. His great grandfather, Amenemhet I, reigned 30 years. His son, Sesostriis III, the pharaoh who made Joseph prime minister, reigned 38 years and his grandson, Amenemhet III, reigned 48 years.

In the light of the long reigns of the pharaohs before and after Sesostriis II, his 19-year reign seems to be quite short. Could it be that Sesostriis II came to an untimely end either through illness, or what is more likely, murder? Could it be that Sesostriis II feared for his life, perhaps afraid of death by poisoning, and therefore, he put the two men most capable of poisoning him, the chief butler and the chief baker, into prison? Or was he ill at the time and feared his end was near? Could it be that shortly after his last birthday feast, Genesis 40:20, during which the baker was hanged and the butler restored, those who wanted him murdered succeeded? Certainly, his early demise, together with all of the events surrounding the installation of the new pharaoh, could have caused the butler to forget his promise to remember Joseph.

Also, it could be that Sesostriis III began to reign, upon the early death of his father, as a comparatively young man and would have welcomed the possibility of help from the young Hebrew who was close to his age and who had already shown great wisdom. Furthermore, in Genesis 45:8, Joseph tells his brothers that he is as a father to the pharaoh, which further strengthens the point that Sesostriis III began his reign as a young king.