Evidence for Inerrancy from an Unexpected Source

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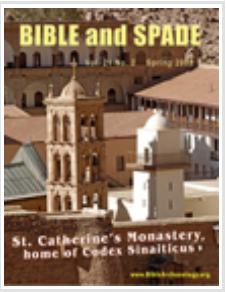

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The Problem

From the beginning of the Davidic dynasty to the release of Jehoiachin from prison, mentioned at the end of 2 Kings, represents a period of about four and one-half centuries. For this time period, the books of Kings, Chronicles, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel provide over 120 dates, lengths of reign, and synchronisms that form the raw material for constructing a chronology for these times. For anyone who tries to assemble these data into a chronological scheme, it soon becomes clear that is a formidable task. Some older interpreters handled the apparent discrepancies in the numbers by introducing interregna, that it is, periods of time during which no king was assumed to be on the throne. This is like using scissors to fashion fill-in pieces as needed for a jigsaw puzzle that otherwise doesn't seem to fit together. To the credit of these interpreters, they genuinely regarded the Bible as the Word of God, and their aim in writing was to explain the text and to strengthen the faith of God's people by attempting to produce a harmonious chronology from the received text.

However, there later arose interpreters who did not share this goal of building up others in the faith. Their goal was to discredit any supernatural explanation of the origin of the Scriptures and the miracles recorded therein, replacing these matters of "faith" with what they were quick to label as a "scientific" approach to religion. But the science of these writers was not the science that brought about the scientific revolution of modern times, because the method of true science starts with observation, whereas these writers started with a theory and then used that theory to reconstruct history. They either trampled on or ignored such observations as were beginning to come from archaeological findings in the ancient Near East. Thus Wilhelm De Wette had no archaeological findings or any other historical facts to support his theory that the book of Deuteronomy was invented during the days of Josiah (1805); the theory merely supplied an explanation to replace the supernatural alternative, namely that it was a revelation to Moses during Israel's wandering in the desert. Neither did Julius Wellhausen build his theory of the development of Israel's

religion on a study of ancient Near Eastern inscriptions; instead an imposition of Charles Darwin's evolutionary ideas and Georg Hegel's dialectic was used to construct an imaginative scheme for the history of Israel and the formation of the OT canon (1878).[2]

Deductive Methodology as Applied to the Problem

Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis and its later offshoots (the socio-economic approaches,[3] Martin Noth's deuteronomistic history [1981], etc.) are examples of the deductive method. Deduction is "inference in which the conclusion about particulars follows necessarily from general or universal premises" (*Webster's Ninth* 1989). One universal premise of these approaches is that the Scriptures did not come in any supernatural God-with-man encounter or revelation, at least in the sense of God speaking to and through Moses as stated in the Pentateuch. Divine revelation was replaced by various explanations of how writers from a later time fabricated stories about miracles and revelations that they ascribed to dimly-remembered heroes from their nation's past. With this view of the origin of Scripture, it would necessarily follow that the various authors who compiled the books of Kings and Chronicles could not possibly have handled correctly all the historical details from the time of the Hebrew monarchs. Thus, with regard to the chronological data in the books of Kings, scholars who followed the fashionable ideas of higher criticism reached the following conclusions:

• Rudolf Kittel: "Wellhausen has shown, by convincing reasons, that the synchronisms within the Book of Kings cannot possibly rest on ancient tradition, but are on the contrary simply the products of artifi cial reckoning."

• Theodore Robinson: "Wellhausen is surely right in believing that the synchronisms in Kings are worthless, being merely a late compilation from the actual figures given."

• Samuel and Godfrey Driver: "Since, however, it is clear on various grounds that these synchronisms are not original, any attempt to base a chronological scheme on them may be disregarded."

• Karl Marti: "Almost along the whole line, the discrepancy between synchronisms and years of reign is incurable."

• Cyrus Gordon: "The numerical errors in the Books of Kings have defied every attempt to ungarble them. Those errors are largely the creation of the editors...the editors did not execute the synchronisms skillfully." [4]

Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) was a German theologian who held teaching positions at various institutions throughout his career. He was one of the most significant figures in destroying faith in the integrity of the Scriptures. The eminent Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen has the following to say about the "higher critical" approach of Wellhausen and his deductive method that were used to accomplish this: "Not only did Wellhausen (like his peers) work in a cultural vacuum—that is how he wanted it to be, undisturbed by inconvenient facts from the (ancient) outside world. He resented being pointed toward high antiquity data from Egypt and Mesopotamia…How he hated Egyptologists!…In due course he also lashes out at the Assyriologists…Clearly, he resented any outside impact that might threaten his beloved theses on the supposed development of Israelite religion and history. And that attitude, one can detect in his equally resistant disciples today" (2003: 494).

Such conclusions about the unreliability of the chronological data of the kingdom period follow logically once the presuppositions of these scholars are granted and their deductive method pursued. The advantage of the deductive approach is that it is readily adaptable to whatever is currently fashionable in intellectual circles. At present that seems to be the socioeconomic approach to historical interpretation, or perhaps the "deuteronomistic history" theorizing of Noth. The disadvantage of the deductive approach is that nothing is ever settled for certain; the results obtained are as diverse as the presuppositions of the scholars, since diverse presuppositions produce diverse results. This is readily seen from the discordant opinions regarding the origin of the text given by scholars who follow the traditio-historic, socio-economic, and other literary-critical methods that force a priori assumptions on the Biblical data.

The Inductive Method

There were, however, some scholars who followed an inductive approach in Biblical and chronological studies. Induction is "inference of a generalized conclusion from particular instances—compare DEDUCTION" (*Webster's Ninth* 1989). Broadly speaking, deduction starts with principles, whereas induction starts with observation, that is, with evidence. When studying the chronology of the Hebrew monarchies, the following areas of evidence should be considered if an inductive course is to be pursued:

1. There is evidence from Jewish writings that the New Year might be reckoned from the spring month of Nisan, and other evidence that it might be measured from the fall month of Tishri.[5] An unbiased approach would consider both these options.

2. There is evidence from the field of Egyptology that sovereigns, during their lifetime, occasionally invested their son with the royal office, thus forming a coregency.[6] The years of the son's reign might be counted from the year he became coregent instead of from the first year of sole reign. Some coregencies in the Scripture are plainly stated, as in 1 Kings 1:34, 2 Kings 15:5, and 1 Chronicles 23:1. An inductive approach should consider the possibility of coregencies, as well as the possibility that the years of a king could be measured either from the beginning of a coregency or from the beginning of a sole reign.

3. There is also evidence from the field of Egyptology for the existence of rival reigns—reigns for which the years of the pharaohs cannot be added together because two pharaohs were ruling simultaneously from different capitals.[7] Such a phenomenon is reported in the Bible for the reigns of Tibni and Omri (1 Kgs 16:21–22).

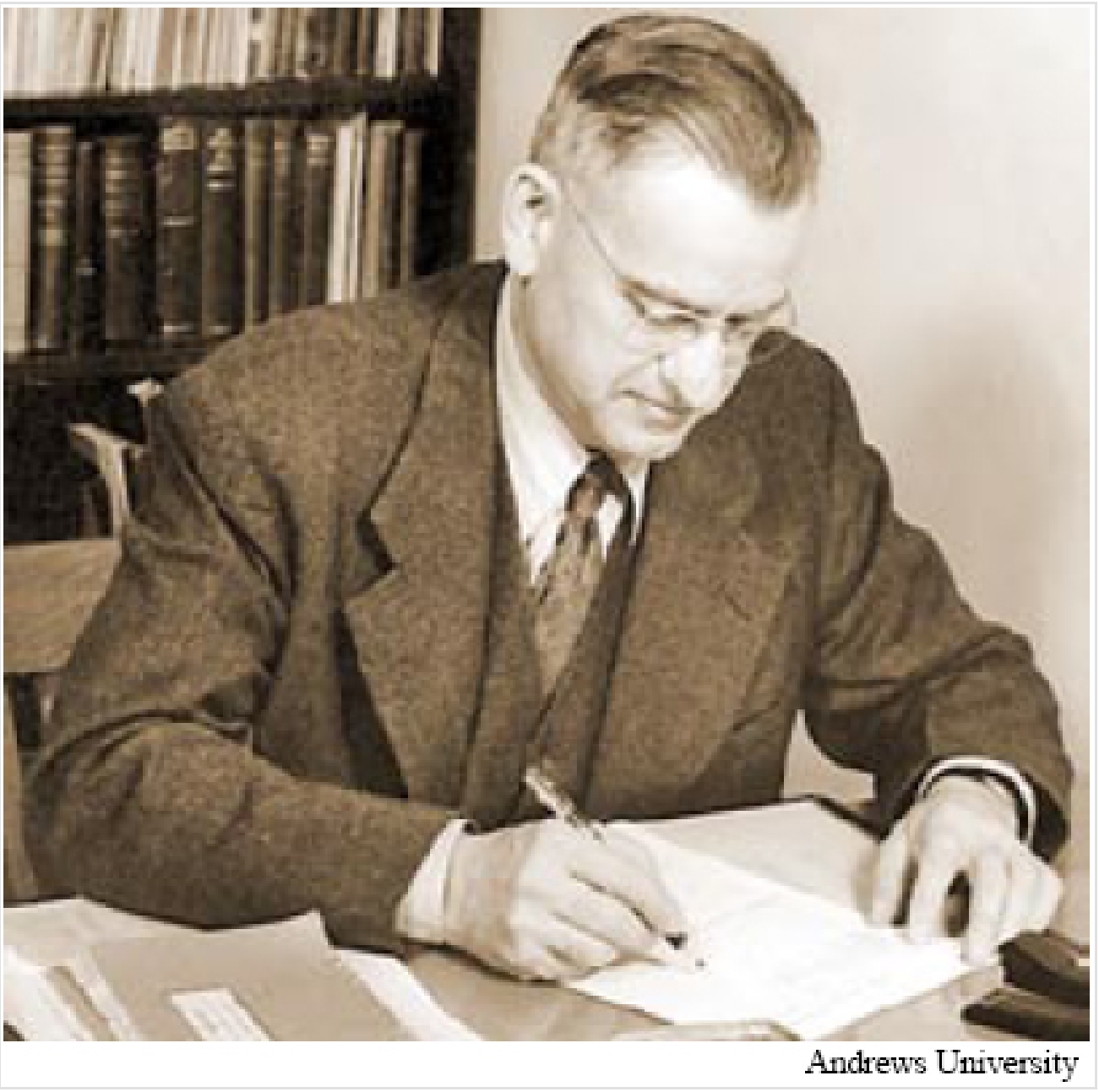
4. There is evidence that there were two ways of reckoning the first year of a king's reign—whether that year was reckoned as year one of his reign, or as his "accession" or "zero" year. The two possibilities are called the non-accession and accession methods, respectively. Since there is evidence for both usages in the ancient Near East,[8] a proper methodology that starts from observations should not rule out either possibility for the kings of Judah and Israel.

5. The final source of evidence for the inductive method would be the texts of Kings, Chronicles, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel that give chronological data for the kingdom period. These texts (in the Hebrew original[9]) should be accepted as raw data (observations) unless they can be shown to be selfcontradictory or contradictory to established external dates.

From this list of observations, it is clear that the inductive approach faces a great difficulty. That difficulty is how to handle the various possibilities inherent in a proper treatment of all the observations just listed and their multiple combinations. The easy way to handle this complexity is to make simplifying assumptions. Thus the *Seder Olam* and the Talmud assume that all reign lengths are measured from the start

of the king's sole reign. Just the opposite assumption was made by Gershon Galil; he assumed that all regnal years when a coregency is involved were measured from the start of the coregency (1996: 10).

An even greater simplification was postulated by Wellhausen, who ruled out coregencies altogether, even the plainly-stated coregency of David with Solomon.[10] The consequences of this kind of procedure are obvious: the scholars who make such simplifying assumptions will not agree with scholars who make other, contradictory assumptions. The simplifications will also produce chronologies that contradict Scriptural texts at some point or another; the scholars will then, unjustifiably, claim that the Scripture is in error because it does not fit their scheme.



Andrews University

Edwin R. Thiele (1895–1986). After a missionary career in China between the World Wars, Thiele pursued studies in archaeology at the University of Chicago, receiving his PhD degree in 1943. His doctoral dissertation on the chronology of the Hebrew kings was based on his extensive knowledge of the history and languages of the ancient Near East. Thiele's approach was to endeavor, first of all, to understand the historical methods and conventions of the ancient authors whose texts provide the raw data used to reconstruct the history of the time. He also believed that the relevant Biblical texts should be considered trustworthy until proven otherwise. This inductive method, coupled with the successes of the resultant chronology, have established Thiele's book, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, as the definitive work on the chronology of the kingdom period. Subsequent scholars who have followed these sound principles have needed to modify Thiele's chronology in only a few places, with the best-known correction being for the reigns of the kings of Judah in the latter half of the eighth century BC.

Successes of the Inductive Method

In contrast, scholars who have used the inductive approach attempt to make no such a priori assumptions. Instead, they employ Scriptural texts to determine the method used by the ancient authors, taking into account the different archaeological and historical evidences listed above, and not ruling out any possibility until there are valid reasons for so doing. In the 1920s Professor V. Coucke in Belgium determined from a careful analysis of the data in Kings and Chronicles that Judah began its regnal years in Tishri, whereas Israel began its regnal years in Nisan (1928). He also determined that the reign lengths of the first kings of Judah and Israel were in harmony with each other if these first kings in Judah used accession reckoning while their counterparts in Israel were using non-accession reckoning to measure their years of reign.

Some years later an American scholar, Edwin Thiele, discovered these same principles, although when he began publishing his findings he was not aware of Coucke's earlier work. Thiele was able to determine the chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah in a more satisfactory way than Coucke, and his principal work, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (1983), went through three editions. The chronology of the northern kingdom, Israel, remained virtually the same through these three editions, and Leslie McFall and other conservative writers only have offered minor modifications such as narrowing the date for the fall of Samaria and the end of Hoshea's reign to the first half of the year beginning in Nisan of 723 BC, rather than allowing for the full year as did Thiele. Thiele's chronology of the northern kingdom has stood the test of time, and in particular his date for the beginning of the divided monarchies is widely accepted by conservative and non-conservative scholars alike.[11]

However, for the southern kingdom, Judah, Thiele failed to recognize that the synchronisms of Hezekiah of Judah and Hoshea of Israel in 2 Kings 18 imply that Hezekiah at this time was coregent with his father Ahaz. This was a blind spot on Thiele's part, because he recognized that Hezekiah's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had coregencies with their fathers, and Hezekiah had a coregency with his son; why then rule out a coregency of Hezekiah with Ahaz? But even though many scholars pointed out this explanation for the synchronisms in 2 Kings 18, Thiele refused to accept this solution and did not even discuss it in the final two editions of his book.

It remained then for others to complete the application of principles that Thiele used elsewhere, thereby providing a chronology for the eighth-century kings of Judah that is in complete harmony with the reign lengths and synchronisms given in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. The most thorough work in this regard was McFall's 1991 article in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1991). McFall made his way through the reign lengths and synchronisms of Kings and Chronicles, and using an exact notation that indicated whether the years were being measured according to Judah's Tishri years or Israel's Nisan years, he was able to produce a chronology for the divided monarchies that was consistent with all the Scriptural texts chosen. This was the logical outgrowth of Thiele's work, and it attained a kind of holy grail that had been sought for 22 centuries, namely a rational explanation of the chronological data of the Hebrew monarchies that was consistent with the Scriptural texts that were used to construct that chronology, and also consistent with several fixed dates from Assyrian and Babylonian history. These fixed dates are the following:

1. The Battle of Qarqar in 853 BC, at which Shalmaneser III of Assyria listed Ahab of Israel as one of his foes (see the further discussion below).

2. The tribute of Jehu of Israel to Shalmaneser in 841 BC.

3. The invasion of Sennacherib in Hezekiah's 14th year, 701 BC.

4. The death of King Josiah when he fought against Pharaoh Necho, who was on his way to take Carchemish from the Babylonians, in 609 BC.

5. Nebuchadnezzar's initial capture of Jerusalem in 605 BC, at which time Daniel and other Judeans were taken to Babylon.

6. The second capture of Jerusalem and its king Jehoiachin by Nebuchadnezzar—the exact date of which is given in the Babylonian Chronicle as 2 Adar, i.e. March 16, 597 BC.

Kurkh Stela depicting Shalmaneser III, king of Assyria. Found in 1861 at Kurkh on the Tigris River in southeastern Turkey, the inscription on the stela records the principal events of the king's fi rst six military campaigns. The campaign of year six, 853 BC, mentions Ahab, king of Israel, as being part of an anti-Assyrian coalition that confronted the Assyrians at Qarqar on the Orontes River in western Syria. The section referring to Ahab reads, "I approached the city of Qarqar. I razed, destroyed and burned the city of Qarqar, his [Irhulēni, the Hamathite's] royal city. 1,200 chariots, 1,200 cavalry, (and) 20,000 troops of Hadad-ezer (Adad-idri) of Damascus; 700 chariots, 700 cavalry, (and) 10,000

troops of Irhulēni the Hamathite; 2,000 chariots, (and) 10,000 troops of Ahab, the Israelite" (Younger 2000: 263). When Edwin Thiele constructed his chronology, the date for the battle of Qarqar accepted by most Assyriologists was 854 BC. This was one year too early for agreement with the Biblical texts, but further investigations showed that the Assyrian data had not been interpreted correctly, so that 853 BC is now the generally accepted date. The stela is currently housed in the "Assyrian Sculpture" room in the British Museum.

Significance of the Successes of the Inductive Method

The significance of Thiele's work and its logical extension in McFall's article can hardly be overestimated. Consider just how improbable such an accomplishment was when starting from the premises of the critics who were cited earlier in this article. They, and many others who could be quoted, believed that it was impossible to construct a coherent and rational chronology from the data given in the received text. The primary reason for this belief (or unbelief) must have been because they saw little reason to pursue all the hard work that Coucke and Thiele had to struggle with before they determined the methods of the Biblical authors; why spend time trying to determine if there was a reasonable explanation of the texts when they were sure that late-date writers, such as they supposed were the authors of Scripture, could not have produced an accurate chronology for long-past events?

In this conclusion they were correct, if their starting assumption is granted. If late-date authors and editors who lived long after the events they were describing put together the Scriptures, then such authors and editors could not have produced the complex chronological data found in Kings, Chronicles, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel that are consistent with each other and also consistent with several dates in Assyrian and Babylonian history. The anti-supernaturalist critics have declared implicitly or explicitly that these presumed writers could never give us a consistent chronology for the kingdom period. However, such a chronology has been produced, and so the critics have established by their own statements that their initial assumption about the late-date origin of the textual sources used in Kings and Chronicles was false.

Their error can be demonstrated as follows. Imagine someone cutting a series of arbitrary shapes out of cardboard—in the present case, more than 120 such shapes—and then hoping that somehow these shapes would fit together in a jigsaw puzzle. Better than the analogy of a jigsaw puzzle is that of a logic puzzle. Figure 1 shows a logic puzzle. The example given deals with trying to match five professors with their classes and their eccentric ideas. The clues, given in sentences one through seven, provide sufficient information to solve the puzzle. An instructive exercise would be to try to make up clues for this puzzle before determining the answer to the puzzle. If this is attempted, it will soon be concluded that late-date editors cannot just invent

clues and have them all fit together; the answer must be known before clues can be provided that will fit together into a solution. Furthermore a sufficient number of clues must be given so that someone else can solve the puzzle.

This illustration is relevant to the Bible's chronological texts related to the divided monarchies. These texts form, in every respect, a logic puzzle. They provide approximately 124 clues to help determine a chronology of the time, compared to the nine clues in the seven sentences of the logic puzzle of Figure 1. Since a little experimentation will show that we cannot produce arbitrary clues that will give any good chance of success for a simple logic puzzle of nine clues unless we know the answer beforehand, then how could someone produce 124 clues that make up the Scriptural logic puzzle, and have all these clues consistent with each other, unless he or she already knew the answer and then was very careful to give a sufficient number of clues to lead to the answer?

Figure 1. Example of a Logic Puzzle.*

Amy takes five classes (including history) at Bimbleman University, each taught by a different professor. At first she was baffled by the fact that each instructor (including Professor Bookwerme) has a different eccentric pet theory, but by now she has gotten used to their digressions. Can you determine each professor's class and theory?

1. Amy's psychology professor is not Dr. Weissenhimer.
2. Her philosophy class meets just after that of the professor who claims that dinosaurs were really aliens who got stuck here on a field trip.
3. Her political science class meets just before the class with the professor who insists that Shakespeare's plays were really written by someone named Larry.
4. Professor Smartalecq believes that gravity is a hoax perpetrated by the hot-air balloon industry; Professor Noetalle does not teach history.
5. Amy's psychology professor firmly believes that the lunar landing was faked on a North Dakota prairie.
6. As one professor orated about dinosaurs, Amy slipped out to attend her next class, led by Dr. Eguehedd.
7. The history professor, who isn't Dr. Weissenhimer, believes that the earth is flat.

	Biology	History	Philosophy	Political	Psychology	Dinosaurs	Earth is flat	Gravity	Lunar landing	Shakespeare
Bookwerme										
Eguehedd										
Noetalle										
Smartalecq										
Weissenhimer										
Dinosaurs										
Earth is flat										
Gravity										
Lunar landing										
Shakespeare										

*Puzzle is from Scott McKinney, "Academia Nuts," in *Dell Logic Puzzles* (Norwalk CT: Dell Magazines, Dec. 2001): 10.

How do you solve a logic puzzle like that of Figure 1? One way is to try various combinations to see if they fit the clues given. But even a fairly simple logic puzzle like this offers so many ways to combine things that our patience gives out. In frustration, then, we take a bold step: make assumptions! Surely no professor of philosophy would believe that gravity is a hoax, and any professor of biology would know that dinosaurs evolved from frogs and after that they evolved into birds and flew away. After a few more such bold assumptions, it will be possible to work out a solution. When that solution conflicts with some of the clues originally given (and it almost inevitably will), we can declare that the original clues are mistakes introduced by an incompetent editor who did not know the facts of the case. This is similar to the authors cited earlier who could not solve the chronological puzzle and who then declared that the Scriptural texts contained numerous errors.

The other way to solve the puzzle is to use the inductive method. That is, start with the clues given and see if they can be combined to give a reasonable solution, without trampling on the clues or throwing out some of them, as in the deductive method. This will be the more difficult way to proceed. But when it comes up with a solution, one that is consistent with all the clues given, who can doubt that it is the right method? And who can doubt that the Thiele/McFall chronology of the divided kingdom that made sense of all the date-formulas chosen in Kings and Chronicles is to be preferred over the chronologies of those writers who followed the deductive method and introduced several assumptions in order to justify their schemes? These were assumptions that Thiele and McFall did not need to make, since they were basically constrained to only the observations that were necessary for the inductive method. Would not all calm and rational minds conclude that a solution that is consistent with the data and which makes the fewest assumptions is preferable to solutions that are not consistent with the data and that make several unjustified assumptions?

Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, king of Assyria 859–824 BC, discovered by Englishman Henry Layard at Nimrud (Biblical Calah), Iraq, in 1846. Each of the four sides is carved with five registers depicting people in different types of clothing representing various countries controlled by the Assyrians. They are bringing costly articles of tribute and exotic animals as offerings to the king. Above and below the scenes are lines of text detailing events in Shalmaneser III's reign down to his 31st year. The second register from the top shows Jehu, king of Israel, bringing tribute to Shalmaneser III, an event not recorded in the Bible. Jehu's tribute was in Shalmaneser's 18th year, whereas the Battle of Qarqar, at which Ahab was present, was in Shalmaneser's sixth year. The 12 years between these two events were just enough to fit in the two kings of Israel who reigned between Ahab and Jehu. These synchronisms allowed Thiele to give absolute BC dates for the last year of Ahab (853 BC) and the first year of Jehu (841 BC), thus enabling him to construct the chronology of the northern kingdom backward from Ahab to Jeroboam I and forward from Jehu to the fall of Samaria. The obelisk is in the "Assyrian Sculpture" room of the British Museum.

Here then is a great mystery: the Author of the chronological puzzle in Kings and Chronicles knew the answer, and He was careful to provide enough clues so that the answer could be found after suitable mental exercise. The chronological texts of the

kingdom period are revealed as an example of something quite awesome: purposeful design. In other words, Intelligent Design. There is no other explanation for how all these texts can fit together, and how a sufficient number have been given so that the chronology can be solved without having to resort to the arbitrary assumptions of the deductive method. But just as opponents of Intelligent Design overlook the truth due to blind faith in their own presuppositions, so practitioners of the deductive method will never see the design inherent in the chronological texts of the kingdom period unless they are willing to give up their wrong approach and their wrong presuppositions regarding the origin of the text.

Close-up of Jehu before Shalmaneser III on the Black Obelisk. Jehu is seen bowing in humility before the Assyrian king, followed by his attendants bearing tribute. The accompanying inscription says , "I received the tribute of Jehu (*Ia-ú-a*) (the man) of Bît-Humrî [House of Omri]: silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden goblet, golden cups, golden buckets, tin, a staff of the king's hand, (and) javelins(?)" (Younger 2000: 270). Jehu was not literally Omri's son; many times the Assyrians referred to countries by the name of the founder of the ruling dynasty at the time of their first acquaintance with it, regardless of which dynasty was currently in power (Younger 2000: 267 n. 5). In reality, Jehu usurped the throne of Israel by assassinating Joram, grandson of Omri (2 Kgs 9:14–26). He ruled 841–814 BC and paid tribute to Shalmaneser in the fi rst year of his reign. Beyond its historical significance, the Black Obelisk provides the only depiction we have of an Israelite king, or any other Israelite named in the Bible.

Some Refinements to the Thiele/McFall System

In speaking of the Thiele/McFall chronological system, it was stated above that it was consistent with all the texts that McFall used to build his chronology. However, McFall did not use some texts out of the approximately 124 of an exact nature that are the clues for this period. My own efforts were directed toward examining all these

additional texts and making it the first priority to determine the methods of the authors of Scripture. In order to manage all the data and their possible combinations without making a priori assumptions, it was necessary to introduce the method of Decision Tables that I had made use of in my work as a systems analyst. Decision Tables had proved invaluable in handling the complexities of the last major system that I designed at IBM. Fresh from this experience, I saw that Decision Tables could be used to explore all the combinations of the chronological parameters that were presented earlier in this article. Decision Tables allow the exploring of all possibilities that are consistent with the investigator's basic assumptions, and they show which combinations of those assumptions are not compatible with the data. The "data," in this case, are the texts being studied and fixed dates from Assyrian and Babylonian history. The method of Decision Tables is entirely logical, and, if used properly, entirely impartial; it provides the final step that is needed in the inductive methodology for examining these chronological texts.

ollection of The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Photo © he Israel Museum, by Ardon Bar Hama

Iran Stela depicting Tiglath-Pileser III. Broken into pieces sometime in the past, the three pieces seen here were acquired on the antiquities market in western Iran. Superimposed on the approximately life-size figure of the king is a record of events through his ninth year, 737 BC. Fragment 1, Column IIIA, lists "Menahem of Samaria" as having paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileser. The publication of the stela in 1994 demonstrated that the 738 date accepted by most Assyriologists for Menahem's tribute was in conflict with this new information. Thiele's date for the tribute (743 or 742 BC), as derived from the Biblical texts, was shown to be entirely consistent with the Iran Stela.

The first contribution that was made by the use of Decision Tables was a resolution of some discrepancies in Thiele's figures for the regnal years of Jehoshaphat, Ahaziah, and Athaliah (Young 2003: 598–99; Young 2004b: 578–79). The second contribution dealt with the end of the monarchic period, utilizing texts in Ezekiel that were not

used by McFall in building his chronology. Ezekiel's texts show that non-accession years are to be used for Zedekiah, contrary to the assumption of Thiele and McFall that Zedekiah's years are given by accession counting. A continuation of this analysis showed that all the Scriptures in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, 2 Kings, and 2 Chronicles are in harmony for Zedekiah's reign, and all show that it ended at the fall of Jerusalem in the summer of 587 BC (Young 2004a12). Decision Tables provided the only convenient way to handle all these texts in a consistent manner. When this method is used, all 124 items of exact chronological data for the period of the Hebrew kingdoms combine to produce a consistent and harmonious chronology for a period of over 400 years.[13]

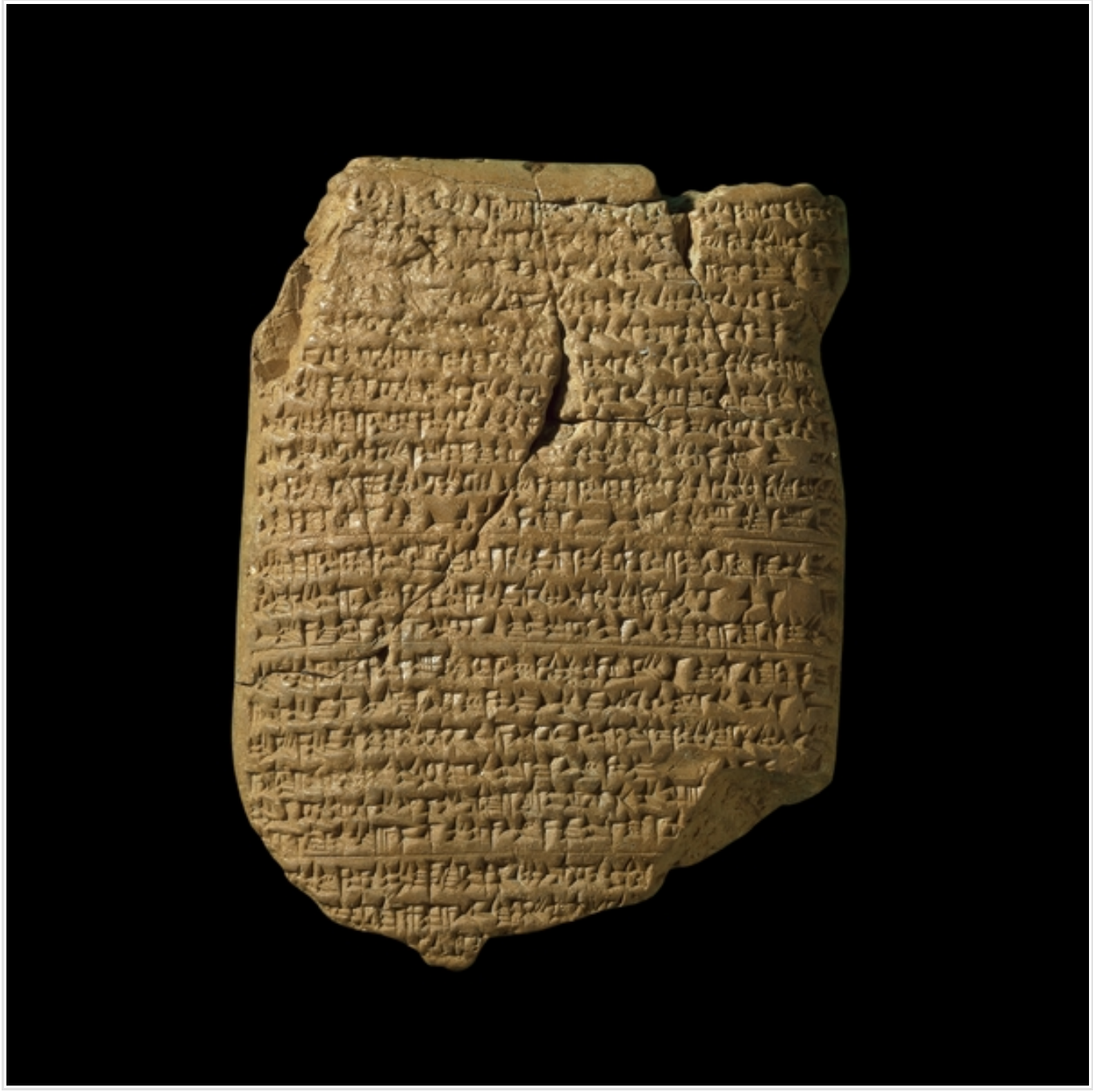
Skeptics may assert that the harmony of these Scriptures is all an artifact of the method of Thiele and those who followed him, even though that harmony was achieved without making the various a priori assumptions that characterize the deductive method. Arguing that the method of Thiele and McFall was an artificial approach would be like maintaining that a logic puzzle of 124 clues could be put together in an artificial and arbitrary way that did not agree with the original design. Anyone who doubts this should try to make up clues for the simple puzzle in Figure 1 without knowing the answer. The clues will generally fail to fit together unless the person giving the clues knows the answer and is very careful to make all clues consistent with that answer. Similarly, the chronological puzzle could never have been put together by Thiele and those who followed him if the original data were not authentic, that is, true to history. Errors in the original data, such as would be predicted by any theory of limited inspiration, would have meant that neither McFall nor anyone else could have combined all 124 exact statistics into a coherent and rational chronology. But this is exactly what has been accomplished by the scholarly and logical application of the inductive method.

Why Is the Problem So Complex?

But why is the problem so complicated? Why has it taken over two millennia until the work of Coucke, Thiele, McFall and others has given us a solution for the chronological texts in Kings, Chronicles, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel? And why must a proper methodology to handle all these data include the use of Decision Tables in order to eliminate wrong assumptions and to show all the possibilities that must be explored before the best solution can be determined?

The same questions regarding methodology could be asked of any non-trivial logic puzzle. It would be very difficult to solve the logic puzzle of Figure 1 without first learning how to use the grid that is included below the puzzle. All puzzle-solvers learn to use these grids. They are really Decision Tables. In the same way, Decision Tables, so invaluable for solving logic puzzles, must be used for the vastly more important analysis of the complicated chronological data of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Kings, and Chronicles.

This does not answer the question of why the data are so complex that it is necessary to be very careful to use a logical methodology that includes Decision Tables in order to handle them and to show which combinations are feasible and which produce contradictions. One might as well ask why it is necessary to master the methods of calculus to gain even a preliminary understanding of the motions of the planets, and beyond that to master both Special and General Relativity if more exact refinements in planetary and satellite motion are to be handled. Does anyone say that these laws are not valid, just because it takes effort and discipline to understand them? Perhaps we would have liked the Scriptures, in matters of chronology, to be easier to understand, so that there would not have been so many interpreters declaring that the Scripture is in error simply because these interpreters were incompetent in determining the methods of the authors of Scripture. In matters essential to our salvation the Scriptures are plain enough that a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein. But in other areas such as the one presently under discussion, God's ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. It was not in the Holy Spirit's design to make all portions of Scripture easy to understand. It was in His design to make all Scripture so it is without error.



Babylonian Chronicle for 605–595 BC, obverse. Lines 1–11 of the front of the Babylonian Chronicle tell of Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of Egypt at Carchemish in 605 BC while he was still crown prince. The same battle is alluded to in Jeremiah 46:2. As the Egyptian army under Pharaoh Neco II was moving north to engage the Babylonians, Josiah "marched out to meet him in battle" at Megiddo and was killed (2 Kgs 23:29–30; 2 Chr 35:20–27). By August, Nebuchadnezzar had advanced far enough into southern Palestine to claim treasures and hostages in Jerusalem, Daniel and his friends being the most noteworthy (2 Kgs 24:1; 2 Chr 36:6–7; Dn 1:1–6). Nebuchadnezzar was then informed of his father Nabopolassar's death on the eighth of Ab (August 15/16, 605 BC) and immediately returned to Babylon where he was crowned king on the first of Elul (September 6/7, 605 BC). The translation and publication of this

Babylonian text showed that the dates accepted by William Albright and other scholars for the Battle of Carchemish were two or more years too late and that Thiele's date, as derived from the Biblical data, was correct.

Successes of the Inductive Method with Respect to External Dates

The Scriptural chronological puzzle cannot stand in isolation. For any solution to be credible, it must match several fixed dates from the histories of the surrounding nations. Therefore it is important to determine which of these dates are truly "fixed," and which are open to question because of possible misinterpretations of the relevant data.

After exerting considerable effort to determine the principles of the ancient Hebrew court recorders whose records are cited in Kings and Chronicles, Thiele produced a relative chronology for the kings of Judah and Israel that was not tied to external dates and which therefore was not expressed in terms of BC years. He then made this into an "absolute" calendar by choosing two dates in which Shalmaneser III, king of Assyria, had contact with the kings of Israel. In his sixth year, Shalmaneser III listed Ahab of Israel as one of his foes at the Battle of Qarqar. Twelve years later in Shalmaneser III's 18th year, the famous Black Obelisk shows tribute being received from Jehu, king of Israel, with what is apparently the figure of Jehu himself bowing at the feet of the Assyrian monarch. The advantage of these two references in Shalmaneser's annals was that the 12 years between the mention of Ahab and the mention of Jehu gave just enough time for the two kings who ruled between Ahab and Jehu, assuming non-accession reckoning for Israelite kings. This means that Shalmaneser's sixth year was Ahab's last year and his 18th year was Jehu's first year.

When Thiele began his studies, most Assyriologists dated Shalmaneser's sixth year to 854 BC and his 18th year, the year of Jehu's tribute, to 842 BC. However, when Thiele used these dates as the anchor points with which to assign BC years to his chronology, he found that the 14th year of Hezekiah, in which Sennacherib threatened Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:13; Is 36:1), came out as one year earlier than the 701 BC date that seemed well established for the Assyrian incursion. The Biblical data could not be made compatible with this date without extensive emendation of the pertinent texts. Which was wrong, the Biblical data or the dates given by the majority of Assyriologists for Shalmaneser's reign? On further investigation, Thiele found a minority opinion, held by some European scholars, which placed the regnal years of Shalmaneser one year later, an adjustment that brought agreement between Thiele's Biblical chronology and the Assyrian records. Thiele developed further the correction of these European scholars, resulting in a revision of the Assyrian Eponym Canon that he published as an appendix in all three editions of Mysterious Numbers. Thiele's revised Canon is now generally accepted by Assyriologists. This was the first of a string of successes in which the Biblical data, as interpreted by Thiele, were able to bring clarity and resolution to disputed areas in the chronology of Assyria and Babylonia.

As illustrated above, scholars who do not have a high opinion of the historical credibility of Scripture invent fanciful reconstructions of the origin of the Biblical text based on antisupernaturalistic presuppositions. This is in contrast with the proper scientific approach that was described by Gary Byers in a previous issue of **Bible and Spade** (1999: 9), an approach that starts with observation, continues with the construction of a hypothesis, and then devises means to test that hypothesis. In the scientific method, the final step in testing a theory is to determine whether it can predict new phenomena that were not part of the observations used in formulating the theory. An example of this was Einstein's prediction, based on his Theory of General Relativity, that light passing by a massive object such as a star would deviate slightly from a straight-line path. This phenomenon had not been noticed previously but it was observed when an appropriate experiment was performed, thereby validating the theory.

In historical studies, experiments like this cannot be performed to verify a theory as in the physical sciences. Something closely analogous to it occurs, however, when a historical theory is shown to be consistent with new data that were not available when the theory was formulated. This happened when Thiele found that his chronology disagreed with the conventional Assyrian chronology for the reign of Shalmaneser III, but further study showed that the conventional chronology was wrong and Thiele's chronology was correct.

There have been other instances where new data, unknown when Thiele first published his ideas, have verified the chronology derived from the Biblical data while demonstrating that interpretations which contradicted the Biblical data were mistaken. An example is Thiele's conclusion that Samaria fell to Shalmaneser V in 723 BC and not to Sargon II in 722 or later, as was accepted by the majority of Assyriologists when Thiele first published his results. Thiele's date was verified in 1958 when Tadmor published a study of Sargon's records showing that Sargon had no campaigns in the west in 722 or 721 (1958: 38).

Another vindication came when Donald Wiseman published the Babylonian Chronicle (1956: 66–75), showing that Nebuchadnezzar's first attack on Jerusalem came in 605 BC, in agreement with Thiele's date for that event but contrary to William Albright and other scholars who placed the event in 603 BC or later. Finally, Thiele had predicted that when the full text of the extant portions of the "Iran Stele" of Tiglath-Pileser III was published, it would show that the date that most Assyriologists gave for Menahem's tribute to Tiglath-Pileser, 738 BC, was based on an improper interpretation of the previously-deciphered text dealing with the tribute. Thiele's expectation was verified when Hayim Tadmor published the full text of the Iran Stele in 1994, eight years after Thiele's death (1994: 260–64).[14]

An Argument for Inerrancy

All this demonstrates that a method that starts with the Scriptural texts and assumes they are correct until proven otherwise is the correct method to use in historical research, whereas the deductive method that is usually followed by rationalist critics of the Bible is ineffective for determining an accurate interpretation of historical events. More than that, their methodology is basically unscientific and irrational.

Another important point should not be overlooked. It is that the inductive approach to the chronological data of Scripture could never have succeeded unless the data it was examining—the texts dealing with reign lengths and synchronisms in Kings, Chronicles, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—were authentic. It was mentioned previously that there are approximately 124 such exact statistics in these six major books of the Bible. The rationalist critics cited earlier were sure that these statistics could not all be correct. For scholars who were predisposed toward a low view of inspiration, the abundant and complex chronological data of the Hebrew monarchies was the one place where they were sure that not just one, but numerous errors of fact could be found. But thorough and sound scholarship, based on an inductive approach, has shown that all these data are authentic. Theories of an errant Scripture cannot explain this accuracy. The authenticity of approximately 124 exact statistics in six major books of the Bible, covering more than 400 years of history, is exactly what would be expected if the doctrine of inerrancy is true and all doctrines of limited inspiration that assume errors in the historical statements of Scripture are false.

This of course does not prove that the Scripture is inerrant. A "proof" of inerrancy would have to establish all facts external to the Bible and then show that all Biblical texts touching on these issues are true. This is impossible. The doctrine of inerrancy will never be established by showing that certain Biblical statements, previously disputed, have been shown by further scholarship to be correct, even though, historically, this has happened in numerous interesting instances. Instead, those of us who hold to the doctrine of inerrancy do so because it is a major theological truth stated in the Scripture itself (Dt 8:3, Pss 12:6, 93:5, 111:7, 8, 119:89, 140, 160, 2 Tm 3:16, Ti 1:2), because it is clearly the position of our Savior, who knows all things (Mt 5:18, Lk 16:17, 24:25, Jn 10:35, 17:17), and because God promises blessing to those who believe His Word (Gn 15:6, 2 Chr 20:20, Rom 4:3, Jas 2:23).

Philosophically, we would expect that if God exists, then He would find some way to communicate to His creatures a revelation (such as the Bible) that was completely trustworthy. And yet we are thinking creatures, so that we look for a way to test the validity of any such purported revelation. The chronological details of the Scripture offer such an opportunity for investigation. The fact that all these texts fit into a rational and believable chronology amounts to a mathematical demonstration that, with a high degree of probability, the Scripture's complex and abundant data dealing with the chronology of the kingdom period are correct.

There are many areas of Scripture where the nature of the material will not allow such a mathematical demonstration. The statements showing that the patriarchs lived longer than is now the norm provide one such topic; currently there is no way to either prove or disprove the Bible's testimony in this regard. Yet when we find that the Bible is trustworthy in the areas that can be checked by careful scholarship using a logical (inductive) methodology, then we can be confident that in those areas where we cannot do such checking, or where difficulties appear that are not yet fully explained, when the full truth is known it will vindicate the truthfulness of the eternal and inerrant Word of God. It was completely unexpected by the critics cited at the beginning of this article that one day the chronological texts that they thought contained multiple errors, thereby proving a defective Scripture, have instead become a testimony both to the inerrancy of God's Word and to the folly of the critics.

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Recommended Resources for Further Study

Footnotes

1. This article is a modified version of my "Inductive and Deductive Methods" paper (Inductive and Deductive Methods as Applied to OT Chronology, The Master's Seminary Journal [TMSJ] 18.1 [Spring 2007] 99–116), and is presented here with the kind approval of the editors of TMSJ. The TMSJ paper was adapted from a presentation at the annual conference of the Evangelical Theological Society, Valley Forge PA, November 2005. The present article differs from the TMSJ version in the last section. In the TMSJ version, this was devoted to a discussion of the date of Menahem's tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III. The present version replaces this with a discussion of the relevance of the successes of the inductive method to the question of the integrity of Scripture.

2. See also the influence of the would-be anthropologist Edward Tylor on Wellhausen, as documented in Richardson 1981: 141–42. Richardson's entire chapter entitled "Scholars with Strange Theories" shows the tremendous harm that theological and sociological theorizing that was not based on observation had in the ideologies and wars of the 20th century.

3. An example of this approach is found in Fager 1993. Fager followed the teaching of Karl Marx that social position determined one's political and philosophical outlook, and he used this idea to reconstruct how Israel's priests fabricated the Jubilee and Sabbatical-year legislation in order to promote their own interests. His approach led him to divide the Jubilee legislation (Lev 25:8–55) into four strata from different time periods, which he displays by printing the text in four different type formats. See the criticism of Fager's work in Lefebvre 2003: 8, 17. Lefebvre starts with an examination of the text as it is, instead of imposing an anti-supernaturalistic theory on it, and he finds that the Jubilee and Sabbatical-year legislation is a coherent and unified whole.

4. All quotes are from Thiele 1963: 124–25.

5. Rosh HaShanah 1a; Josephus, Ant. I.iii.3; Seder Olam 4.

6. See, for example, Redford 1965: 116; Der Manuelian 1987: 24; Ball 1977:272–79.

7. Modern Egyptologists believe that whole dynasties of pharaohs were ruling simultaneously, such as the 9th and 10th Dynasties with the 11th, or the 16th and 17th with the 15th, even though the overlap is not stated in Manetho's king-lists or in the Turin Canon of Kings (Kitchen 1986: xxxi).

8. The Seder Olam, chaps. 4, 11, and 12, assumes that all years for Israel's kings and judges were given by non-accession reckoning. This method is generally assumed in the Talmud. Babylonia and Assyria usually used accession reckoning. Tiglath-Pileser III, however, used non-accession reckoning, contrary to the customary practice in Assyria. This example serves as a warning that the choice of whether to use accession or non-accession reckoning was arbitrary, and the choice was probably made by the king himself. Applying this to Judah and Israel would suggest that whether a king used accession or non-accession years must be addressed anew for each king; it is not sufficient to assume that because a certain king used one method, then his successor must have used the same method. To assume uniformity in this matter would be consistent with the deductive method of making arbitrary assumptions, but a careful study of the Scriptural data shows that it is an improper assumption.

9. The translators of the LXX (Greek translation of the Old Testament) attempted to harmonize various readings of the Hebrew text that seemed to be contradictory, and in doing so they produced various readings that cannot be assembled into a coherent chronology without postulating multiple arbitrary emendations. For a demonstration of the failure of attempts to produce a coherent chronology from LXX variations from the Hebrew text, see Young 2007b.

10. Wellhausen was followed in this presupposition by two of the more recent authors of chronological studies of the OT: Hughes 1990: 99, 103, and Tetley 2005: 117. After such rejection of well-established practices from the ancient Near East in order to

make things simpler, these scholars find it necessary to make a plethora of secondary assumptions in order to explain the disagreements of their systems with the data.

11. Among the many scholars who have accepted Thiele's date for the beginning of the divided monarchies are Mitchell 1991b: 445–46; Walvoord and Zuck 1983: 632; McFall 1991: 12; MacArthur 1997: 468; Galil 1996: 14; Finegan 1998: 246, 249; and Kitchen 2003: 83.

12. This article on the date of the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians is useful in showing the technique used to determine the chronological methods of the various Biblical authors who dealt with the closing years of the Judean monarchy, and then showing, once these methods are determined, that all Scriptures dealing with dates for this period are in agreement.

13. These 124 exact statistics are summarized in four tables at the end of Young 2005: 245–48. The purpose of the tables is to show that all synchronisms and reign lengths in the six relevant Biblical books are precise, without need of alteration from the numbers given in the Hebrew text, and without any need of special pleading for the reasonableness of the resultant chronology. Writers whose schemes do not fit the Biblical data often contend that the reason for the lack of fit in their scheme is that the Biblical numbers are only approximate. This contention flies in the face of what we know about the official court records of the ancient Near East, particularly those from Assyria and Babylonia, and the great concern that the priests of these nations had in keeping an accurate calendar.

14. Despite the evidence of the Iran Stele showing that Menahem's name was in a "summary list" of tribute, and thus could not be used to date the tribute to a specific year, Tadmor did not abandon his earlier position that the tribute was in 738 BC. This contradicts Thiele's date for the death of Menahem in the six-month period before Nisan of 741 BC. In order to maintain the 738 date, Tadmor gives an unsupportable translation of the relevant text in the Assyrian Eponym Canon (1994: 268). For the details, which are somewhat technical, see my original version of this article (2007: 113–15). A less extensive critique of the 738 BC date for the tribute was presented in Mitchell 1991a: 326. Although Mitchell wrote before the full translation of the Iran Stele was published, he nevertheless recognized that the argument placing the tribute in 738 BC was weak, and he preferred instead 743 or 742.

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