The Age of the Earth:  
The Biblical and Historical Evidence

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I. Introduction

Therefore, those who would construct a chronology of the Old Testament must continuously remember the fact that by and large its writers had only a secondary interest in chronology (Oswalt, 1979, 673). However, the fact does not imply that they gave no concern to the accuracy of the data that they did use. The accuracy of the Scriptural information has been verified time and again. The most impressive example of this is seen in the work of Edwin R. Thiele on the records of the kings of Israel and Judah (Thiele, 1965). These numbers had long defied any kind of harmonization, both among themselves and with extra biblical literature. Thiele has shown, however, that the harmonization is possible, and that, more importantly, it is possible only because of the uncanny accuracy of the recorded figures. Therefore, the chronological data in the Scripture should be considered valuable. The statements of the Scripture should be regarded as correct and capable of harmonization with the data from the other spheres of the investigation.

The correct methodology for the Old Testament chronology is twofold: (1) It is first of all to seek the Biblical key to the interpretation of each piece of data, and (2) what must be done, then, is to locate synchronisms with

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neighboring cultures whose events can be dated absolutely. One may learn the relative relations among certain events on the internal evidence from study of Scripture alone. However, that study cannot clearly establish their dates because their relative chronology is not correlated with any event, astronomical or terrestrial, which can be placed on the present absolute scale. Therefore, the student of the Old Testament chronology must also make use of extra biblical materials to investigate the points of contact (synchronisms) between the Old Testament history with the secular history and to obtain external data if he wishes to establish the dating of biblical events on an absolute scale with reference to the birth of Christ.

As for the second millennium B.C. only one extra biblical reference is known from Merneptah's so-called "Israel Stele" found at Thebes, and it is, indeed, the first extant reference to Israel outside of the Bible (Millard, 1985, 92, 100, 101; Oswalt, 1979, 674). This is a reference to a defeat of Israel by Merneptah, pharaoh of Egypt, in 1224 B.C., but the reference is not helpful for establishing an absolute date because the Bible mentions no such defeat (Oswalt, 1979, 674). Besides the Bible mentions not one king of Egypt or Mesopotamia by name who has been identified with certainty, and the secular records of the second millennium B.C. do not mention any individual known from the Bible. Egyptian kings are just referred to as "pharaohs," but pharaoh is not a personal name, and Mesopotamian kings mentioned by name such as Amraphel of Shinar or Chedorlaomer of Elam (cf. Gen. 14:1) are not yet identifiable from the available records (Horn, 1979, 17). Thus, prior to the kingdom period all biblical dating must be calculated from within the Bible, without specific external evidence against which to check results. Fortunately, however, there are a few such synchronisms with Mesopotamia during the first millennium B.C., which make it possible to give an absolute date at least as far back as the end of the United Kingdom period of the Israelites.