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The Basics of Old Testament History

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The Bible is the standard historical document by which all the early periods the Gentile nations surrounding Palestine must be judged. Although discoveries of early Assyrian records can give us some information back to the 8th and 9th centuries BC, and Egyptian accounts go back even farther (sparsely here and there), it is difficult to comprehend where many of those historical records belong chronologically. Therefore, we need the Bible as a guide, as a standard for ancient history.

Editor's Note: Dr. Martin presented another lecture with a similar name to this lecture. Both were presented in 1986. The subject of that article, "[The Key to Old Testament History](#)" focused on the "Axial" period of the 6th century BC. [This article](#) covers a range of time from the Axial period, to today, and to our future. DWS

The scriptural revelation gives us information about Palestine. Palestine was directly in the geographical center of, and a bridge between, the two great riverine civilizations of Egypt on the south and Mesopotamia on the north. It could not help but absorb (and in some cases influence) the culture, philosophies, and economic pursuits of those civilizations on its flanks. Therefore, the Bible can provide us with reliable accounts of what was happening in those peripheral areas if we pay close attention to the texts.

The fact is, the main international highway for trade and travel between Egypt and Mesopotamia went right through Palestine!¹ There can be no doubt that the type of civilization we find flourishing in Palestine at any given time must in one way or another reflect the same types of civilizations to the south and north. Palestine at its southernmost point is a mere 200 miles from urbanized Egypt and its northern point is about 300 miles from Mesopotamia. This proximity to those riverine civilizations (and being a bridge between them)

¹ See "[The Geopolitics of Israel, Ancient and Modern](#)." This article by Dr. George Friedman shows the special geographical influence that the land of Israel/Palestine has had on the region and the world throughout biblical and secular histories. DWS

is sufficient evidence that all three areas must have shared aspects of civilization, with differences that geography would naturally demand. By giving information about events in Palestine, the Bible also gives us information about the history of the larger Middle East and sometimes even the entire world. It does not give us a full account of the history of Egypt (obviously it does not), nor of Assyria or Babylon. The Bible does not even give us a full account of what was happening in Palestine itself. It gives us the major factors to work out chronologically and geographically where to put important events of the past **in sequence** for a greater understanding of the message which God has given to mankind.²

The Bible As a Source of History

With the Bible we have a consistent but sparse history that God gives us as a standard to work out what happened in the peripheral areas in the Middle East. The Bible is not intended to be a book of history. It is a book of redemption, yet it has history in it. For us who believe the Scripture, we will not have any problem accepting the teachings of the Bible as being God's word. After all He was on the scene before mankind was ever created and put on earth. The Bible was given to show the plan of redemption from Adam to Christ, to the Second Coming, and even beyond until the full reconciliation of mankind is made with God the Father. All that is to be found in the Old and New Testament together.³ That being said, all the themes of Scripture are within a historical context.

The Old Testament has history in it that shows forth God's way of looking at things, as being God's story or God's account to mankind, what truly matters in life as far as our understanding of the past is concerned, so that we can know where Christ fits into everything, where we fit at the present time, and what will happen in the future up through the time of the redemption of all mankind.

The "Axial" Crisis

In the 6th century BC, the world changed. A great destruction passed from one country to another around the globe. Jeremiah was the chief prophet called to tear down former civilizations (Jeremiah chapter 25) and build up a new one (Jeremiah 1:10), the civilization we know today. When Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon became the head of gold, the Book of Daniel says he was to be the head of a new civilization that would last until the Second Coming of Christ and the emergence of the Kingdom of God on this earth. That has not happened yet. We still live in the "Babylonian system" that began in the 6th century BC.

Surprisingly, it is almost impossible for anyone to fully appreciate or comprehend what the Old Testament is all about — without understanding the scriptural events of the 6th century BC. The reason for this lack of knowledge is because events within that period obscured what happened in the earlier periods. Almost 75 years ago [before 1986], Professor Sayce in the Eleventh Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* said that scarcely little is systematically known about world history before the 9th century BC, except what we find recorded in the Bible.

Today that situation has not changed. It is no wonder scholars find it difficult to say with certainty what was happening in Middle Eastern history prior to the 6th century BC, and this especially applies to historical events before the 9th century. Historians today believe Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was limited in extent. This is because little archaeological evidence has been found to suggest that his kingdom extended beyond Mesopotamia, Palestine, and parts of eastern Asia Minor. Few records survive. There are some records in Assyria and Syria, in Babylon and Egypt, but before the 6th century BC it is difficult to fit many of those records into a chronological scheme that makes sense.

² Comprehending the sequence of events and their relationship to each other is more important than precise chronology. DWS

³ Even doctrinal issues of the Bible have historical environments. If we do not know what the history was at the time doctrines were given we will have an inadequate understanding of what those doctrines are trying to tell us. That goes for prophecy as well. Prophecy has a historical basis to it in the past. We are "in history" at the present time. Prophecy is nothing more than history in advance. If you and I want to know what is on the horizon in front of us, or even the remote future, we will have to go to the only source which can give us a legitimate and reliable account. That is the Holy Scripture. DWS

People have overlooked an important indicator in Jeremiah 1:10 about Jeremiah's commission from YHWH. Jeremiah 25:12 begins a rundown of the nations intended for destruction given in geographical order. The list started with Judah and Jerusalem. There was to be a total overthrow of all political systems in the entire world. Only the kingdom of Babylon was prophesied to survive in a social and religious sense.

From Babylon (head of a new world system, Daniel 2:31–45) would develop the civilization that predominates in the world. Babylon was the head of a **“new world order”** whether the system manifested in Palestine, in Egypt and Africa, in India or China, in Europe, even in the New World (North and South America).

The basic philosophical and religious concepts of world societies (though modified by racial and geographical differences) were to have a common origin from the head, Babylon. If one will believe the teachings of Scripture, Babylon in the 6th century BC maintained influence in all areas of the world, as Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar: **“wheresoever [everywhere] the children of men dwell ... [God] has made you ruler over them all ... you are the head of gold”** (Daniel 2:38).

Jeremiah said Nebuchadnezzar would conquer all Egypt (Jeremiah chapter 46), as did Ezekiel (Ezekiel 29:17–21). Ezekiel added that all the lands of North Africa would also be taken over by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 30:1–6, and the rest of the chapter).

A Greek writer of the 4th century BC, Megasthenes, wrote a history of India. His writings were well known and quoted by several ancient authors, although no originals exist. Megasthenes shows that Nebuchadnezzar figured prominently in the history of India. Megasthenes also traveled along North Africa and even into Spain. He confirmed that Nebuchadnezzar did indeed conquer India, all North Africa and even Spain.⁴ Again, we do not have any other information from ancient or classical records, or archaeological finds to demonstrate the widespread influence of Nebuchadnezzar.

We do have the Bible, however, which says that Nebuchadnezzar did indeed have influence throughout the entirety of this globe. Scholars might scoff at this, but it is there in Scripture if a person looks at it very carefully. One day archaeology will discover that Nebuchadnezzar's authority was indeed as widespread as Scripture attests and that all the great philosophers and religious leaders of the 6th century BC were in many ways influenced by the **“head of gold.” “Your greatness [Nebuchadnezzar] ... reaches unto heaven and your dominion to the end of the earth”** (Daniel 4:22).

Why Modern Civilization Developed Under Babylon in the 6th century BC

All older civilizations prominent from the flood of Noah to Nebuchadnezzar ended and their people took on drastically new philosophical and religious movements. Jeremiah was told by YHWH that all nations of the world would be judged with devastating wars and revolutions (Jeremiah 25:12–33, 27:6–7). Human populations in all areas of the earth were to be greatly reduced and their civilizations destroyed. Jeremiah was also commissioned **“to build and plant,”** but before any building and planting could take place, the “old” had to be pulled down before the “new” could be built up.

God told Jeremiah that King Nebuchadnezzar would perform YHWH's judgment of destruction in the Middle East as God's servant (Jeremiah 25:9–11, 27:6), and that desolation would reverberate around the earth. The Kingdom of Babylon would remain as the head of gold, the head of what was left of civilizations throughout the earth (Daniel 2:38). This is what Jeremiah and Daniel prophesied would happen and I see no reason not to believe them.

Destroying Civilizations

After the wars of desolation were over and populations greatly diminished, the prime means by which people would be made to break with their past was **(1)** take the remaining population out of their lands, then **(2)** introduce new religious beliefs, and especially **(3)** destroy all their historical and religious literature!

⁴ Nebuchadnezzar is spelled variously as “Nabukodrosor” or “Nabouchodonosor.” See the fragments (with sources) in “Megasthenes: *Indika*.” See also Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 10:227–228. DWS

The most important thing was to bring the people to a state of historical illiteracy and not to let them read their native literature which would perpetuate their national existences. In that illiteracy they were introduced to new literature in the Chaldean language which reflected only the views of the head of gold. Nebuchadnezzar did this wherever he conquered or had influence.

(1) **REMOVE PEOPLE FROM THEIR HOMELANDS.** Nebuchadnezzar adopted a policy that he learned from the Assyrians who preceded him. To develop a completely new civilization (particularly if it was to be a “world civilization”), it was necessary to take people away from their native lands (to which they had great attachment in a religious and philosophical sense) and bring the elite of the nations to Babylon. This is exactly what he did with Judah as attested in Second Kings chapters 24 and 25. He took away from the land all the artisans and professional people (2 Kings 24:14–16), yet he was willing to leave the uneducated (mostly illiterate people) to till the soil. These were **“the poor of the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen”** (2 Kings 25:12). Because of their rebellion against YHWH even these poor people were finally removed from the land (Jeremiah 52:15) and the land of Judah (central Palestine) remained almost vacant of people for several decades (see Jeremiah 44:2).

Jeremiah said that many of these transported foreign people would one day **“turn every one to his people, and they shall flee every one to his own land”** (Jeremiah 50:16). This would allow people in later years who had learned Babylonian ways to take that learning back to their own lands and adapt them to their native teachings.⁵ This is why in the 6th century BC and shortly afterward people in different areas of the world began to accept new philosophies and religious beliefs that their ancient forefathers knew nothing about. Chaldean teachings (with native adaptations) spread into India and then to China and Japan. They went west into Europe and Egypt and then through Africa. By colonization, some influence went even into North and South America.

(2) **INTRODUCE BABYLONIAN BELIEFS.** With the Temple and the cities of Judah in total ruin, Nebuchadnezzar took up a program of re-educating the people (and not only with Judah, but with all people he conquered or controlled economically). Most literature from their libraries and all their important religious artifacts were put under lock and key in Babylon (Daniel 5:1–4). The people were denied access to their historical and religious literature (what was not destroyed) and they were required to learn and to use the language of the Chaldeans (Aramaic) and most lost the ability to speak Hebrew (Ezra 8:8).

Representatives from around the earth were brought to the Kingdom of Babylon (Daniel 4:1). Daniel and his three friends were taken from Judah to Babylon and made to learn the philosophies and culture of Babylon and the Chaldean tongue (Daniel 1:4). All peoples taken captive to Babylon were required to adopt “Chaldean ways” and give up their old manner of living (Daniel chapter 3). Many nations with various languages came under the influence of the head of gold (Daniel 3:4, 7). They became imbued with the political and religious teachings of the Chaldeans.

This spread of Babylonian influence in the 6th century BC from its source in Mesopotamia can be traced, especially in its religious impact. In the middle of the 19th century a book was written that tried to synthesize the early historical records regarding the development of religious beliefs among peoples who maintained such literature. It was called *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop. Though later research showed that a great deal of revision needs to be done to Hislop’s thesis, it is evident that most religious systems within the world today have some (or many) teachings that stem from a Babylonian idea exported from Mesopotamia near the 6th century BC.⁶ Realize that the Bible states unequivocally that Babylon had become the head of gold of a new world system. The Book of Revelation called the religious and political societies of the 1st century AD “Babylon” (Revelation 17:5), as will the generation just preceding Christ’s Second Advent.

⁵ This process is called “syncretism,” the blending of different belief systems of philosophy or religion. Babylonian elements were in every one of the new philosophical and religious movements — as always, with God’s permission and control. Syncretism is the same process by which New Testament Christianity became polluted with pagan practices and concepts. Dr. Martin’s book, [“The People That History Forgot”](#) (free online) tells of movements of peoples up to the time of Simon Magus and beyond. DWS

⁶ Alexander Hislop, [The Two Babylons, Or, The Papal Worship Proved to be the Worship of Nimrod and His Wife](#) (J. Wood, 1862). Several versions are available on the internet. The best versions are those with illustrations. DWS

Christ included the Judaism of His day as being a part of the Babylonian system (Matthew 21:42–45), and that the Jewish religious leaders were heeding beliefs that had their source with the “**head of gold.**” Thus, the whole world had become influenced by this Babylon that had its origin in the 6th century BC.

(3) **DESTROY HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS LITERATURE.** Another way to wean people from the past and from their religious and philosophical beliefs is to take away their history, take away their books, and take away their ability to link to the past. If you burn down the libraries, if you get all the books that people might have, destroy them, or put them under lock, you bring them to a kind of historical illiteracy. Then you change their language. Make the captive peoples speak Babylonian (that is Chaldean, a type of Aramaic tongue), and then to reinstruct them into religious beliefs and philosophies put forth by Nebuchadnezzar and by the new head of gold. That is the way to bring in a brand-new civilization.⁷

The policy of Nebuchadnezzar was to make all captive peoples in his empire illiterate as to their historical and religious literature, and require them to adopt a new form of civilization known as “Babylonianism.” His methods were very effective because God required this new change and called Nebuchadnezzar “**my servant**” (Jeremiah 25:9, 27:6) and the “**head of gold**” (Daniel 2:38). A Gentile system of belief (that even Jewish people absorbed) was created which shall continue until the Messiah appears from heaven.

This period from the 6th century BC onward is known in the Scripture as “**the times of the Gentiles**” (Luke 21:24). This is the period in which Gentiles predominate in world affairs. We are still within that period when the head of gold and the rest of the image, depicting political and religious powers succeeding Babylon, are still in control of world affairs.

Great Britain (which exercised world authority in the last century) and the United States along with the Soviet Union [Russia in 2008], Europe, China, India, and Japan, all which have the mastery today are part of that “Gentile predominance” which will remain in authority until the Kingdom of God arrives on earth under the auspices of Christ Jesus. In no way do the present British and American societies and governments represent modern Israel as some people claim. The apostle Paul said that Israel as a nation will not accept the basic teachings of Christ (as we have) until just prior to Christ’s Second Advent. Paul made this clear in Romans chapter 11.

The Importance of National History and Literature

The only solid link to the past which any civilization has is through its historical, philosophical, and religious literature. In the 6th century BC virtually all the literature within the nation of Judah was destroyed except that which found its way into the libraries of Nebuchadnezzar. **Remarkably, Daniel the prophet came to oversee what remained of the early literature of Judah** (Daniel 9:2). About a hundred years after Daniel, Ezra (who canonized the Old Testament,) quoted from only ten earlier works of history other than what he placed in the canon itself.⁸

There are references scattered throughout the Old Testament which show that many of the prophets, priests and kings were busily occupied with writing various types of literature. For example, Isaiah wrote a major history of the kings of Judah and Israel (2 Chronicles 32:32) and both Nathan and Gad composed separate histories of the exploits of King David (1 Chronicles 29:29). Indeed, even four hundred years before David, the Canaanites had an important city southwest of Hebron called Kirjath-Sepher (which means “city of letters” or “city of books”), a city devoted almost entirely to the production of literature and no doubt it had a repository like a library for book preservation (Joshua 15:15–16; Judges 1:11–12).

But note this. Not a particle of this prodigious amount of ancient literature, which over the centuries must have accumulated to hundreds of thousands of scrolls, has come down to us **except the infinitesimal amount**

⁷ Alexander the Great had the same desire as Nebuchadnezzar, to create a unified world but with Greek culture. Alexander ordered his generals and soldiers to marry wives from conquered territories to make the world culture Greek. This enforced spread of Greek culture and civilization is called Hellenization. DWS

⁸ For a list of those books see [Restoring the Original Bible](#), see “[Chapter 12: The Old Testament Periods of Canonization](#)” pages 182–183 in the printed edition. DWS

that is within the Holy Scriptures. The canonization of the Scriptures was YHWH's method of preserving some of this literature. Since it is normal for peoples to hold on to their ancient literature with reverence, it can only be surmised that this early literature of the people of Judah was forcibly taken from them and systematically destroyed.

There is a long history of libraries in ancient times being destroyed when one civilization replaced another. Even in the New Testament we find that people burned books they previously owned when they changed from one religious belief to another (Acts 19:19). Thus, it is reasonable indeed that most of the thousands of books that existed in Judah before the time of Nebuchadnezzar perished in flames because the head of gold was developing a new type of civilization.

The retention of earlier books would have been a deterrent to weaning people away from their past. This is the reason that hardly a scrap of pre-6th century literature (other than the Bible) has come down to us from Judah and Israel. This is why the Scriptures are so important to tell us what happened in those earlier periods.

Books from Solomon's Time and After

The Bible mentioned thousands of literary works that were composed by Solomon alone. **"And he spoke three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five"** (1 Kings 4:32). It must be understood that the use of the word "proverb" means "parable" and it could mean a short statement or several chapters. For example, Proverbs 1:7 to 9:18 represents one continuous "proverb" or parable.

The one song of Solomon (of his thousand and five) which we have available is his "Song of Songs" in the Bible and it occupies eight of our chapters (Song of Songs 1:1). All the other thousand and four songs (like dramatic operas) that Solomon wrote have all disappeared. Not only that, Solomon must have been a prolific writer on all types of subjects because near the end of his life he admitted **"of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh"** (Ecclesiastes 12:12).

It also says that the kings of the world came up to hear Solomon and his great wisdom. They likely knew of him from his writings and wanted to meet him. Solomon spoke on many things that great numbers of people were very interested in also. He went into medicine, into biology, into agriculture, and all types of things. It is amazing what was being done at that time. It would be wonderful if we had those early works, even those of Solomon alone.⁹ The Bible gives us a terse remark that his ships took three years to fetch gold and other exotic products from far off lands (1 Kings 10:22).

The lost books would probably tell us that they went to what we call the Americas today. Psalm 72 was composed **for** Solomon, and it shows the extent of Solomon's influence. That Psalm shows that in his time Solomon had economic authority around this globe! Truly, there was trade going on all over the world under Solomon. When the Bible briefly explains that King Jehoshaphat later built ships on the Red Sea to go to Tarshish (Spain and the western areas of the Mediterranean, 2 Chronicles 20:35–37), the destroyed ancient books would no doubt explain **how** the ships were designed and constructed to go around Africa, into the Atlantic, and then back to Palestine via the Mediterranean; and they would have traded along all the coasts.

All that we have available today to show that these things occurred are the short comments in the Bible. But thanks to Almighty God, He has provided us with a reliable history, the Holy Scriptures, for events in Palestine and surrounding countries before the 6th century BC.

This all shows that Solomon was a great writer. In the time of Solomon, a great deal of literary activity was going on; there is no doubt. When you read the Scriptures about the time of Solomon it shows just how glorious his kingdom really was. It reached out to all areas of the world. It even says that Solomon built ships down at the gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea to go to Tarshish and to Ophir and it took these ships 3 years to go and to come back (1 Kings 9:26, 10:22; 2 Chronicles 8:17, 9:21).

⁹ This rarity of pre-axial period books makes even more important the possibility of any writings that might be contained in the tombs of Kings David and Solomon of Israel. The possibilities are staggering. See ["The Location and Future Discovery of King David's Tomb."](#) DWS

There was great trading going on around the world. Solomon economically, and in some cases almost politically, controlled vast areas of this world. Thousands of books must have been available to explain what was happening in the time of Solomon and in earlier times. All of this was virtually destroyed.¹⁰

When you come down to the Classical period, the Hellenistic (Greek) and Roman periods, there were indeed histories of the past. Josephus the Jewish historian records that Solomon was mentioned only by two classical Hellenistic historians. One was named Menander. The other was Dios. All they said was that Solomon was able to exchange riddles with Hiram, King of Tyre, but that Hiram was able to best Solomon in the contest of riddles (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 8:55–62, 143–149). That was all. There were no other sources.

Josephus scoured the libraries of his time to find out justification for the existence of Judaism from a historical point of view. He tried his best to go into the records written by classical historians, and he found only these two references to Solomon by Menander and Dios who each wrote a Phoenician history and mentioned Solomon twice in a minor way. Those were the only two records Josephus could find from Gentile sources about Solomon and his worldwide greatness and glory. It is because of the paucity of this information that many scholars today believe that the Bible could not possibly be telling the truth about the glorious Solomonic empire back about 925 BC.

Later when Daniel interpreted the dream of the image that Nebuchadnezzar saw, Daniel told the king that he was the **“head of gold.”** Daniel 2:38 makes it abundantly clear that his influence was to reach out to the entirety of this world. I have no reason to dispute what Daniel said. I believe the influence of Nebuchadnezzar did extend around the world unto India, China, and from there to the New World. Go to Daniel 4:22 when Daniel again interprets for Nebuchadnezzar about the great tree that the king saw and how the tree was to be cut down. His power was a **“dominion to the end of the earth.”**

Solomon also had influence around this world, yet hardly a person today believes it. We should believe the biblical revelation. Most of the works before the 6th century BC that supported past history and gave evidence perished, particularly those that were in Israel and Judah.

When Ezra the priest was canonizing the Old Testament he mentions in the Book of Chronicles ten major works which survived into his hands. They no doubt came from Daniel because he oversaw the libraries in Babylon. Ezra certainly had the books of Jeremiah and others in his hands that he was able to preserve. They came down to him. There were others mentioned in the Old Testament that we do not know anything about at all. They all perished.

Before that time, we have very little literature you can rely on to tell us what was going on. In the kingdoms of Israel and Judah the only information we have are in the Holy Scripture. The literature that Ezra picked out with his helpers in the 5th century BC to include in the Bible were the cardinal bits of information that you and I need to know. They give us a historical basis to everything of Jeremiah’s time and the future and it will even help us to know where we are at present.

When you go back farther into the time of Joseph in Egypt, there is hardly a thing that has come down from that period. Yes, there are some references by Christian scholars in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th centuries AD, picking up scraps of information they received from certain Egyptians about how the pyramids were built, and how they were associated with Joseph, etc., but hardly anything is available. The great destruction of literature when the change of civilization occurred in the 6th century BC made it very difficult to penetrate the curtain that came down over world history at that time.

We ought to be thankful to Almighty God that we have the biblical revelation. It is absolutely vital to pay attention even to the short statements, the terse ones, which give us small hints about what was happening in the time of Solomon, or in the time of Moses, or going back to the Book of Job (composed before the Exodus, about 1600 BC). You can pick up little things showing that they had a knowledge of what was happening around the world. In Job 38:30 it mentions that Job was familiar with the fact that there were places on earth where entire oceans froze over. **“The waters are hid as with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen”** (Job

¹⁰ Remember, God Himself allowed all this knowledge to be destroyed, perhaps to be “rediscovered” later. DWS

38:30). He was well acquainted with the arctic regions back in the 1600s BC. You can pick up all types of little bits of information like that.

We have very few historical documents to support these things. That is one reason scholars simply scoff when anyone who believes the Bible says these things have relevance. God said He would restore knowledge at the end of the age and one of these days He shall do so. It will come in a way to show that the Bible can be vindicated. I absolutely believe it. We have the scriptural revelation in our midst right now.

If you and I will simply believe it, we can begin to understand things of the past that others cannot comprehend. Most people are not able to do so today because they will not accept the Bible as God's revelation to mankind, which is necessary if we want to come to a central knowledge of the past. That knowledge supports what is happening at the present. It also vindicates what will happen in the future.

Scripture is the standard to understand the past. The literature that has been found through archaeology in Egypt and Asia Minor, amongst the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Elamites is very difficult to piece together in a chronological way without the biblical revelation.

Principles for Interpreting Old Testament History

I want to give you some important principles in correctly interpreting historical information from the Old Testament. The ramifications need to be rehearsed and emphasized. Without recognition of these principles the Old Testament will be practically unintelligible as far as understanding history is concerned.

First, remember that the Old Testament was canonized (the various books selected and put in order) by Ezra the priest in the 5th century BC. According to Jewish tradition and histories going back even before the time of Christ and certainly with Josephus in the 1st century, Ezra was the one who gathered the books all together, arranged them, and gave them to the Jews in Jerusalem about 400+ years before the birth of Christ. From then on they had what we and they called the Holy Scripture. Read more details of how that came about in my book [*Restoring the Original Bible*](#).

Here is an important point that needs to be emphasized. When he selected these earlier books of the Bible, some going back 1,000 years to the time of Moses, Ezra had an audience of Jews in front of him who had just come out of the Babylonian captivity. Some had come out decades before, but some had just returned. Many of them did not even know the Hebrew language. Ezra had to interpret and give the sense of what the earlier writings actually meant. When Ezra did this, he wrote some books himself.

It has been traditionally stated that the author of the Book of Malachi was none other than Ezra himself.¹¹ That may very well be the case. Let us say that he wrote the Book of Malachi. He also wrote the Book of Ezra, and no doubt with it the Book of Nehemiah. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are related companion books that form one scroll or book in the Jewish counting of books of the Old Testament canon. Ezra also wrote the Book of Chronicles, called First and Second Chronicles today which was originally one long book. It was put in last position as far as the overall order of the books of the Old Testament was concerned.

When Ezra wrote about the genealogical tables that Moses referred to in the Book of Genesis, he changed some of the spellings and some of the geographical indications. He did this because by Ezra's time the people were not aware of what happened back in Moses' times and some things Moses wrote were not completely understood. So, Ezra gave different spellings, sometimes even to the names of the patriarchs and others who lived in earlier times, and where various peoples settled around the world. He also gives a little bit of interpretation here and there.

When the various books were written or when they were canonized, if the subjects were about past times, often they bring the reader up to Ezra's time and use language understandable to individuals living when the Book of Chronicles was written. It gives the history of the past, but brings that history up to the time of the Jews living in the 5th century BC. This was done so they might comprehend in an intelligible way what happened in the earlier period.

¹¹ In Hebrew the name "Malachi" means "my messenger." DWS

Updating the Text – Five Historical Principles

The first principle is this: you will find “updating” of information so that people of later times can understand what was going on in the former period. This is evident even in the time of Moses. It is most important to realize this. Moses himself used updated historical and geographical indicators and terminology that were understandable to Israelites at his time to express what was going on in former times. Some terms that were known earlier lost their meaning and Moses had to bring them up to date. When Moses told the children of Israel where the Garden of Eden was before the flood, he used geographical terms that Israel of the 15th century BC would understand. The people who lived before the flood would not have known what he was talking about. Moses had to tell the people of his time the truth of these matters.

A second principle: The Bible is not trying to hide information from people, rather it is trying to make things clear. Of course, when it comes to symbols and things like that, you must have the mind of God and His Spirit to really understand it, to put it all together, but that is what we are trying to do (Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:16; Ephesians 4:23).

Updated and “modern” terms that Moses used were better understood by the people of his time to explain what had happened some 2,500 years before. So, Moses used geographical terms that would not have been available back at that pre-flood time. This is a principle that is most important to comprehend regarding history. It is also important for understanding prophecy for our day today.

A third principle: We must know when the various Books were written in the Bible and apply the geographical and historical terms pertinent to the era of writing, not the era under discussion, but when they were written. For example, Moses wrote some 2,500 years after the creation of Adam and Eve. In the interim a great flood had wiped out the former civilizations. On the earth after that time came individuals who spread around the world and gave their names to various areas after the tower of Babel.

Moses came on the scene some 800 years after the flood. He gave people geographical terms and historical information that they could comprehend at that time. Again, when it comes to symbols and things like that, you must have the mind of God and His Spirit to really understand, and understand the verses listed above. With the Spirit we can begin to understand some of these things if we apply the principles we find in the Holy Scripture to begin with. We must know when the various books of the Bible were composed. That is why chronology is so important.

A fourth principle: Geography is important because we need to know precisely where events took place. Moses wrote using geographical terms pertinent and understood by the people of his time, in the 15th century BC. This is easily demonstrated but it needs to be understood completely. Let me give an example.

Moses and the Garden of Eden

Let us examine the narrative in chapter 2 of Genesis where Moses tells the location of the Garden of Eden. He uses terms relevant in his time, not older terms from the time of Adam and Eve. The Israelites might not have understood the older terms Moses could have used. So here is Moses’ description of where the Garden of Eden was: **“And YHWH Elohim planted a garden eastward in Eden”** (Genesis 2:8–9). He means **“eastward”** from the geographical location where he (Moses) and the children of Israel were in the wilderness. Therefore, the Garden of Eden was located eastward from where Israel was at moment.

“... and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made YHWH Elohim to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it was parted, and became into four heads.

• **Genesis 2:8–10**

Notice, where is the location of this river? It started from a central source and began to come down. The

garden of Eden was on a higher elevated area, and it started with a single river, which came into four heads. Then he names these rivers:

“The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasses the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone.

• **Genesis 2:11–12**

The word “Havilah” is a geographical term that was only known after the flood, but Moses is telling the Israelites of his time where the garden of Eden was located and the disposition of this river.

“And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasses the whole land of Ethiopia [Hebrew: Cush].”

• **Genesis 2:13**

Cush was a son of Ham, son of Noah. Cush came on the scene only after the flood. Moses is talking about the land of Cush that existed in Moses’ time so that Israel would know where it was. This river Gihon encompassed the land of Cush.

Two separate areas became known as Cush. As time went on the Cushite people, after the tower of Babel event and the confusion of the languages took place, most went farther east and established themselves in northern India around the Hindu Kush Mountain range area between India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Others went around the Arabian Peninsula and across the Red Sea at Aden into Africa. They became the Cushites of Africa. Both were dark peoples who came from Ham which means “dark” or “warm.” The black peoples of northern India and south of Egypt both are from Cush.

This river Gihon (which we cannot completely identify at this time) encompassed the whole land of Cush. Obviously, it does not mean the Cush in Africa because the River Nile flows from south to north. This Gihon River flows north to south.

“And the name of the third river is Hiddekel [the Tigris River today]: that is it which goes toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates.”

• **Genesis 2:14**

Notice that Moses says, **“goes toward the east of Assyria”**? Assyria was named after a man named Assur. Assur was a descendant of Shem, a son of Noah. Shem conceived Arphaxad who in turn conceived Assur. Assur gave his name to Assyria. He lived after the flood. That is why if Adam and Eve could have read what Moses was saying about the geographical areas that the garden of Eden encompassed, they would not have known what he was talking about. Cush and Assur (who gave the names to those regions in the east that Moses and the children of Israel knew about) did not come on the scene until after the flood. It means just to the east of Mesopotamia. Moses was using these terms that were pertinent to explain to the Israelites of his own time, where these lands were. This is important for us to realize so we can understand the origin of the races today.

Without the Bible the history of the Middle East before the 9th century becomes highly problematic and practically unknowable. This is especially true in regard to positioning (in a chronological sense) the few records of historical events that have come down to us from modern archaeological discoveries and the sparse historical information preserved for us from classical times.

Therefore, the world needs so desperately to consult and rely upon that consecutive history found within the pages of the Holy Scriptures. The Bible presents nothing less than the essential historical evidence (provided by God Almighty, YHWH Himself), to give us the keys to straighten out the chronological and historical information from secular sources now in our possession.

A fifth principle: Since Palestine is so close to Egypt and Mesopotamia, it is a foregone conclusion that the type of civilization found in Palestine (as shown by the Bible) would be virtually the same as those in Egypt and Mesopotamia because the peoples were so near in a geographical sense to one another. Thus, the Gentile civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia, within any given period, no doubt experienced the same type

of civilization as Palestine.

If one will simply review (and believe) what the Bible said happened in Palestine from the flood of Noah to Nebuchadnezzar, we can know with confidence what civilizations were in vogue in Egypt and Mesopotamia because they were so close to Palestine. This will give us a major advance in comprehending the history of the ancient world. The method is so simple that one wonders why scholars in the world have not widely adopted this procedure. But most scholars show no interest whatever in allowing the Holy Scriptures to be the standard for determining what happened in the Palestinian central area of civilization. They have abandoned the standard given to the world by God the Father.

The Seven Periods of Old Testament History

There were seven distinct periods of time that the Bible talks about as being different from one another prior to Ezra the priest in the 5th century BC. Events in Palestine had consequences outside of Palestine, and vice versa. It is simple to realize this when the evidence is set forth (the time lengths are approximate).

1. Patriarchal period, 600 years, Noah to Joseph
2. Egyptian period, 200 years, Joseph to Moses
3. Judges period, 400 years, a dark age
4. Glorious period, 80 years, David, and Solomon
5. Kings of Israel and Judah, about 393 years until Jeremiah
6. Babylonian captivity period, 70 years, Judea emptied, Jerusalem destroyed
7. Post-exilic Period, from Cyrus' decree to Ezra's canonization

The First Period, After the Flood — 600 years

The time from the flood of Noah to Joseph the patriarch (who oversaw nationhood, prosperity, and slavery to Egypt) legitimately can be called the Patriarchal Period. It takes no more than a few hours of study to determine the type of civilization that existed in the world for that 600-year period. After the dispersion of the races into their various tongues at the Tower of Babel (about 200 years after the Flood), the remaining peoples in the Middle East struggled with very small and limited populations to develop into local city-state societies.

The dispersion of the races, along with geological changes that separated the continents from one another, happened in the time of Peleg in the fourth generation from the Flood (Genesis 11:17). The name "Peleg" means "division" and **"in his days was the earth divided"** (Genesis 10:25). At that time, the peoples were **"divided in the earth after the flood"** (Genesis 10:32).

During the 400 years after the Tower of Babel (up to the time of Joseph), the Bible shows that only small numbers of people inhabited the Middle East. In Palestine during the time of Abraham, when four nations came to conquer the five cities of the plains of Jordan, Abraham was able to subdue all four kings with a force of 318 allies (Genesis 14:14). The so-called "nations" were only small families of peoples and in no way could they be reckoned as populous "nations" that we think of today.

Indeed, a little later, the Bible says that ALL the men of the city of Sodom were able to assemble at the door of Lot's house (Genesis 19:4–5). This shows there could not have been more than two or three hundred people that made up the entire population of Sodom. Two generations later, only two of the sons of Jacob (Simeon and Levi) were able to kill ALL the men in the city of Shechem who were recovering from being circumcised (Genesis chapter 34).

Without doubt, the Holy Scriptures show that the so-called "nations" of the world during the first 600-year period after the Flood were merely enlarged families and the population on the earth was very sparse indeed. This means that the "nations" of Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, and others had very small populations.

Recall that Abraham went to Egypt with perhaps fewer than 50 people in his group, but as soon as he

arrived the Pharaoh knew immediately that he had come into the country (Genesis 12:10–20). The whole of Egypt probably numbered no more than four or five thousand souls at the time. This is what the Bible shows was occurring for the 600-year period after the Flood. It should be accepted as the truth. Thus, to properly evaluate the small amount of historical data in Egypt or Mesopotamia that have come from this period of time, these essential clues from the Bible on the sparsity of population must be taken as a standard for proper historical interpretation.

The Second Period — 200 years

A revolution in civilization began as soon as Joseph was elevated to be second next to Pharaoh in Egypt. About 70 people of the family of Jacob (Abraham’s grandson) went to Egypt near the end of the 18th century BC, but the conditions were so good in Egypt for the next two centuries that a population explosion occurred that was unprecedented in any previous times.

“The children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.”

• ***Exodus 1:7***

So great did they become that they began to rival (and even to surpass) the population of Egypt itself. **“Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we”** (Exodus 1:9). Therefore, the Egyptians must have had nearly the same population as Israel. The Amalekites (a people of Edomite and Canaanite mixture) also must have had near the same population because they were able to succeed in war over the Israelites as long as Moses’ hands were not elevated (Exodus 17:8–16). Yet at the beginning of the second year of the Exodus, the Israelites (with their abundance of population) were afraid to go into the land of Canaan to subdue it (Numbers 13:25–33). This surely indicates that the population of Canaan must have been near the equal of the Israelites.¹²

This information shows that when one major area of the Middle East began to increase greatly with a glorious civilization (in this case, Egypt), the same increase was experienced in one way or another in all the surrounding areas. It should be expected that the civilizations in Mesopotamia also increased in prosperity and population at the same time. This means that the archaeological evidence, and the historical records that have come down to us, ought to reflect this 200-year period as one of glory and prosperity.

We should look for this period to be a time of great building activity in all areas of the Middle East. This is when many pyramids, canal systems, and outstanding buildings such as ancient temples, palaces, tombs, labyrinths, and other public and private constructions were created, which even today many of us admire. Beginning with Joseph the world came into a period of glory, and it lasted just over 200 years until the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. This is what the standard (the Bible) shows, and it is true!

The Third Period — 400 years

The majestic civilization found in Egypt ended abruptly when the area was subjected to the destruction of the ten plagues which YHWH decreed upon Egypt (Exodus chapters 7–9). So desolate did Egypt become that a psalmist in the time of David stated that the whole land of Egypt was then taken over by **“the people inhabiting the wilderness”** (Psalm 74:14).

Barbaric tribes from the desert (probably the Amalekites, known as Hyksos) invaded and took over the land of Egypt. For about 400 years Egypt went into a period of economic and political decline. Not until the time of King Saul and King David of Israel does the Bible even mention Egypt, and when it does it shows that Amalekites were then occupying the northern parts of the country (1 Samuel 15:7, 27:8) and that the Egyptians were servants to the Amalekites (1 Samuel 30:11–13).

¹² For Dr. Martin’s understanding about the population of Israel at this period, see Bible Secret #95: [“Israel’s Population at the Exodus.”](#) More information is in [“Appendix 6: The Population at the Exodus.”](#) DWS

This tells us that the very people Israel fought and defeated just before reaching Mount Sinai (Exodus 17:8–16), went westward to Egypt (it had been destroyed by the ten plagues) and they subjected what was left of Egypt to a servitude that lasted almost 400 years. These desert peoples brought a “dark age” in Egypt. However, the “dark age” was not only felt in Egypt. All the artisans and professional people of Israel were sent into the wilderness for 40 years because of their rebellion to God and none of them were able to enter the Land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua.

A new generation of Israelites had come on the scene and for all practical purposes they became a “desert people” who knew little about a proper agricultural and urban society which the earlier generations in Egypt knew well. After driving out most of the Canaanites from the land of Palestine (and with the death of Joshua and the elders), Israel experienced the same “dark age” that happened to Egypt. Indeed, so far down had Israel gone from practicing proper economic matters, that for the same 400 years that Egypt was in a type of barbarism, so was Israel.

Israelites even lost the ability to work with metals. As late as the time of King Saul they had to journey to the coastal cities of the Philistines to obtain axes and plowshares. The civilization within Israel had degenerated so low that **“there was no smith [blacksmith] found throughout all the land of Israel”** (1 Samuel 13:19–22). Besides being a “desert people” at the time of Joshua (and with few skills to carry on a higher form of civilization), they either killed off or drove out most of the Canaanites who could have taught them the arts of civilization. In fact, YHWH Himself commanded that they drive out the Canaanites who maintained the civilized arts, and this added to Israel’s punishment for their rebellion to God during the Exodus. Thus, a great “dark age” developed which lasted until the time of King David, some 400 years later.

Not many Canaanites were left in Palestine after the conquest of the land under Joshua. The principal command of God was that the Israelites should “drive out” the Canaanites, not simply to kill them off (Exodus 33:2; Deuteronomy 7:1; Psalm 44:2). Most of the Canaanites left Palestine, but some were left in the land and the remnants were not “hastily” driven out (Judges 2:21–23).

As a matter of fact, King David was responsible for “driving out” the remaining Canaanites (except those who became temple servants, 1 Chronicles 17:21). The New Testament confirms that God **“drove out”** the nations of Palestine **“unto the days of David”** (Acts 7:45).¹³ So, not only did Joshua push out the Canaanites and other tribes in Palestine, but after the lull in expulsion during the great “dark age,” David took up the mantle of Joshua and completed the task.

The Fourth Period — 80 years

This is the glorious period of David and especially Solomon. You should analyze this period by reference to the books of First Kings and First Chronicles. Worldwide prosperity and flourishing trade were occurring. Israel under David and Solomon benefitted from being the land bridge for open trade between Egypt and Mesopotamia.

The Fifth Period — 393 years

The same analysis in Kings and Chronicles applies to the 393-year period of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Little needs to be said about this period at this time.¹⁴

¹³ This meant larger groups or cities of Canaanites, not individuals such as Uriah the Hittite (The Hittites were Canaanites from Heth, a son of Canaan.) or small groups. Canaanites continued in the land after David (Genesis 10:15–16; 2 Chronicles 8:7–8). DWS

¹⁴ **Editor’s Note:** I highly recommend *A Synoptic Harmony of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles: with Related Passages from Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezra*, edited by James D. Newsome, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986). This useful book has the Revised Standard Version of Kings and Chronicles set in side-by-side columns so you can visually see at one view all the information from both biblical books, along with other relevant passages. This book is extremely useful for straightforward historical study if you are interested in the details of the Hebrew monarchies. You may have to verify some of the RSV translations.

The Sixth Period — 70 years

This period begins with the destruction of Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple in 586 BC. This is when our modern world came into existence. Jeremiah and Daniel were the two main prophets who introduced and told about this new type of civilization. This is when Nebuchadnezzar became the head of gold (Daniel chapter 2). At this time, the land of Judah lay practically vacant of peoples for several decades (2 Chronicles 36:21).¹⁵ A new age had dawned and from then onward the world was to come under the religious, political and philosophical domination of “Babylon,” the head of gold.

The Seventh Period

This period covers the time from Cyrus’ decree that the Jews could return from Babylon and rebuild the city and temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1–4), to the close of the Old Testament when it was canonized by Ezra in the 5th century BC. It shows clearly that the “Babylonian image” was very much in control, indicating that Gentile domination of world affairs would prevail from then onward. We are now in this period in a prophetic sense.

This period will not end until the ten toes on the feet of the image are destroyed by a stone cut out without hands that rolls down a mountain and hits the image on its feet (Daniel 2:34–35, 44–45). This occurs at the second advent of Christ to this earth. This is in the future when the Kingdom of God will emerge and begin on this earth what we call the millennium of Christ’s reign.

Conclusion

We who love and trust the biblical revelation have a decided advantage in comprehending the true history of early civilizations because we accept the only source to unlock the ancient history of the world. The Bible is the only document in the world today that gives a consecutive history of the world from Adam to Ezra. There are no others!

To sum up, the Old Testament contains a record of primary historical events which occurred in the Middle East (especially Palestine) from the time of Adam to the 5th century BC. Indeed, it is the only document that provides us of the modern world with a consecutive history for the periods prior to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, in the 6th century BC. Before Nebuchadnezzar it is very difficult for modern historians to construct a consecutive historical scenario of the ancient nations of the world (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, India, China, etc.). This particularly applies to the periods before the 9th century BC. The Holy Scriptures are the only source of historical information that can take us, with a connected sequential account of prime events, back to Adam.

We are now within the final hours of the civilization in which the **“head of gold”** predominates. We are also approaching the end of the **“times of the Gentiles”** (Luke 21:24). The Bible can open not only the history of the past in all its phases back to creation, but it is also the document that provides the world with the information of what will happen in the years ahead of us leading to the development of the Kingdom of God on earth. It will all occur right on schedule.

Ernest L. Martin, 1986

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In my [“Israel and Judah”](#) series of 40+ articles, I begin with David being anointed as the King of Judah. I put the Samuel-Kings narrative side-by-side with the Chronicles narrative, with added narrative from the prophetic books where relevant. The historical commentary involves the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Periods of the Old Testament history outlined by Dr. Martin in this article. *DWS*

¹⁵ Population decreased around the world from wars, famines, plagues, natural disasters — all were God’s judgments upon the nations predicted by Jeremiah. *DWS*