

A proposed solution to a chronological problem—2

Last week I set out to show that the chronological data of Scripture and of the Spirit of Prophecy for the era of the late Hebrew kings are consistent and correct. The discrepancies some see in the data result from deductions they draw from the Assyrian sources—deductions I consider unwarranted. Granting the construction I proposed in the earlier article, which harmonizes the Scripture data, there *must be* alternate and reasonable interpretations of these Assyrian sources. The aim here is to show that there are. The pertinent inscriptions are by Tiglath-pileser (746-727 B.C.), Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.), and Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.).

Tiglath-pileser states that he received tribute from a king whose name is given as Jehoahaz. There is no king in this era by this name. It has been proposed that the Assyrian scribe meant Azariah (Uzziah),¹ an identification allowable by the condensed chronology but not by the reconstruction. This name can be more reasonably taken to refer to Ahaz, a known contemporary of Tiglath-pileser. Scripture records this payment of tribute by Ahaz (2 Kings 16:7, 8) while there is no mention of such payment by Uzziah.

Tiglath-pileser also states that he received tribute from Menahem,² an incident referred to in 2 Kings 15:19. The name of the recipient is there given as Pul. Pul has been identified as Tiglath-pileser.³ By the proposed reconstruction, Menahem had been dead five years at the accession of this king. It is evident that this statement provided *one* source of pressure *seeming* to require an abbreviated period between the death of Uzziah and the fall of Israel. An additional factor is now introduced, which has not

been duly considered, in presuming that the Assyrian sources demand such abbreviation at the expense of the integrity of Scripture.

On the death of the Assyrian king it was customary to elevate to kingship a son of the preceding king who had been serving as general in the army. Payments of tribute were, more often than not, made to the acting general, rather than to the king in person. There is no deviation from acceptable procedure in assuming that this was so in the case of Menahem. This concept is of sufficient significance to digress briefly to present evidence in support of the application of this premise here, as well as in certain other cases where there is a discrepancy of a few years between Scripture and the Assyrian sources.

Why a shift?

Menahem paid his tribute to Pul (2 Kings 15:19). In a later verse, dealing with an incident a few years later, the name shifts from Pul to Tiglath-pileser (verse 29). Pul is the same person as Tiglath-pileser.⁴ Why this shift? The simplest explanation is that there was a shift in the status of Pul in the meantime—namely, from general to king. The fact that the recipient is said to be “Pul the king of Assyria” does not preclude this explanation. The Biblical kings were regarded as reigning from the beginning of coregency. It is not surprising that an Assyrian general who later became king would also be so recognized, though he did not name the years until accession.

At times the Assyrian kings made no distinction between their accomplishments as general from those as king. For example, Sargon claimed that it was he who conquered Samaria.⁵ This claim was altogether

ethical if he was the acting general at that time. A further example of this, for which such an explanation is clearly the correct one, will be noted shortly.

Current scholars have not hesitated to use this same premise to explain discrepancies of a few years in their proposed identifications. For example, King So (2 Kings 17:4) is identified as the Egyptian king Shabaka.⁶ Yet this identification must assume that he was then a general, since Shabaka did not become king until after the time of Hoshea.⁷

With these considerations before us, the puzzling statement in 2 Kings 18:13 may be satisfactorily explained without compromise of the integrity of Scripture. The verse reads: “Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them.” Sennacherib reigned from 705 to 681 B.C. The fourteenth year of Hezekiah, based on an accession in 729 B.C. (2 Kings 18:10), is 715 B.C. This is ten years before the accession of Sennacherib. This discrepancy has been met by associating this incident with the invasion of Judah by this king in 702/701 B.C.,⁸ in terms of a chronology that assumes a 15-year coregency of Hezekiah with Ahaz and assuming that this is the fourteenth year of his sole reign beginning in 715 B.C.

The assumed misstatement in 2 Kings 18:13 is explained by others as a slip in the pen of inspiration or an insertion by a later hand. All these devices are unnecessary. The incident belongs to the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, dated 715 B.C., and occurs shortly after the fall of Israel, as suggested by the position of the statement in the sequence of events recorded in 2 Kings 18:1-13. The paragraph symbol at verse 13 in the King James Version is not part of inspiration. It belongs with verse 14. There was a historical gap of 14 years between verses 13 and 14. The time is in the reign of Sargon, predecessor of Sennacherib, and was not part of the invasion of 702/701 B.C. The explana-

tion of why the Bible writer credited this incident to Sennacherib is the same as that for crediting Tiglath-pileser with the collection of tribute from Menahem. Sennacherib was the acting general under Sargon at this time.

This explanation is not without adequate support. In the first place, Sennacherib did not take the cities of Judah in his campaign of 702/701 B.C. He intended to do so (2 Chron. 32:1), but this intention was rudely shattered with the destruction of his army. He failed to take Jerusalem, and with this destruction he abandoned his campaign (2 Kings 19:35, 36).

Second, Sargon records a campaign to the west that involved Judah, among other areas. The pertinent part of the inscription reads: “To the kings of the lands of Philiste [Philistia], Iauda [Judah], Edom, Moab, who dwell by the sea, payers of tribute tax to Assur my lord, (they sent) numberless inflammatory and disdainful (messages) to set them at enmity with me to Piru [Pharaoh] king of Egypt.”⁹

There follows reference to his victory over Iuamani (of the Philistines). The remainder of the inscription, which could be expected to record his campaign against Judah, is damaged and unreadable. Rogers recognized that this inscription has reference to the incident of 2 Kings 18:13. He wrote:

“While Sargon was engaged in these petty but annoying wars with small states, Egypt was again plotting to gain some kind of foothold in Palestine. Ashdod was now chosen as the starting point for another effort. By some means Philistia, Moab, Edom, and, most surprising of all, Judah, were drawn into this new opposition to Assyria. Hezekiah was now king of Judah and in their fresh union with Egypt, he was flying in the teeth of the advice and warning of Isaiah.”¹⁰

This placement of the incident of 2 Kings 18:13 in the reign of Sargon is confirmed by Ellen White. She wrote: “A few years after the fall of Samaria the victorious armies [of Assyria]

reappeared in Palestine, this time directing their forces against the fenced cities of Judah, with some measure of success; *but they withdrew* for a season because of difficulties arising in other portions of their realm. Not until some years *later*, toward the close of Hezekiah's reign, was it to be demonstrated before the nations of the world whether the gods of the heathen were finally to prevail."¹¹

The remaining inscriptions to be considered are by Shalmaneser III. He states that in his sixth year he received tribute from a king whose name is given as Ahab, and that in his eighteenth year he received tribute from Jehu.¹² These dates are 12 years apart. Since the last year of Ahab is separated from the first of Jehu by 12 years, these inscriptions are offered as absolute proof of the dates 853 and 841 B.C., respectively, for the last year of Ahab and the first of Jehu, thus providing a supposedly solid basis for the chronology of the subsequent Hebrew kings.¹³ But is this an unequivocal basis for "establishing" a chronology that must question the integrity of Scripture for this later era?

Apart from the continued discrepancies with Scripture in the subsequent chronology pointed out in a previous article, this interpretation represents a serious anomaly in itself. It must assume that Ahab, as one of 12 confederate allies of Syria, participated as a principal figure in a battle against Assyria fought on Syrian soil. But Ahab was slain in a battle *against* Syria in this same year.¹⁴ It is improbable that Ahab *ever* participated in any such adventure, but even less probable that he could have mustered the forces for a war against Syria so soon after the huge losses noted by Shalmaneser.

In this case it is not possible to assume that the incident belongs to an earlier era when Shalmaneser was general under an earlier king, since the named (eponym) year of the engagement is stated. The error is rather quite the same as that which identified

Ahaz as Jehoahaz by a later Assyrian scribe. Whatever the nature of these errors of identity, the error is of Assyrian origin, not Biblical. Ahab was long since dead by the sixth year of Shalmaneser.

The statement of Shalmaneser to the effect that he collected tribute from Jehu in his eighteenth year remains acceptable, though Scripture says nothing about any such payment. In any case the incident would belong to the late reign of Jehu, and not to his first year.

A further statement by Ellen White remains to be considered. She states that the temple of Solomon "crowned the summit of Mount Zion" for more than four centuries.¹⁵ In view of the accuracy found to hold for other of her statements when the chronology of the late kings is brought into line with Biblical data, this statement should not be ignored. Solomon's temple was destroyed in 586/585 B.C.¹⁶ On the basis of the

above assertion, the *minimal* date for the beginning of these four centuries is 987/986 B.C. While the structure could be said to have "crowned the summit" of the hill a few years prior to completion in his eleventh year (1 Kings 6:38), a minimal date for the accession of Solomon would seem to be 994 B.C.

The tentative date for Solomon in *The SDA Bible Commentary* (971 B.C.) is 23 years short of this minimal date. Even by the proposed revision, which moves the dates back 13/12 years, the date would be 984 B.C., still a full decade short of meeting this minimal figure. The Commentary chronology assumes a 12-year coregency between Jeroboam II with Jehoash. There is no other example of coregency in the entire line of the kings of Israel,¹⁷ suggesting an unwarranted assumption in this case. As was found in the case of the overlapping years of Pekah,¹⁸ so here these overlapping years evidently

represent rule from a different site (probably in Transjordan), and the years were not part of the 41 attributed to Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23). This allows a further expansion of the chronology by an additional 12 years, as represented in Chart 2 (See REVIEW, Aug. 10, p. 7.) The statement by Ellen White, as with others previously noted, is now correct and consistent. This statement could hardly have been made except by inspiration.

The beginning of the reign of Uzziah in the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam (2 Kings 15:1) was then the twenty-seventh year of his *total* reign, not the twenty-seventh year of his forty-one-year reign. With a dating of Solomon in 994 B.C., obviously the dates for the Exodus and the 430-year period move back in time by this same 24 years. The need for these corrections was not recognized by the writer when his volumes on the Exodus problem¹⁹ were published. I find that while the absolute dates there proposed must also be corrected to meet this revision, no proposed synchronism or interrelation of significance is disturbed. The evidences offered for the revision continue to hold.

DONOVAN A. COURVILLE
Loma Linda, California
Concluded

Restored

By GERALD F. COLVIN

When Jesus comes and time is lost,
When angels sing the victory won,
Then He will call His sleeping saints,
"Come forth! Come forth! Thy sleep is done."

And they will rise from tomb and vault,
From shaded glens of tilted stones,
From cliffs and seas, from caves and dens,
From war-pocked fields of broken bones.

Immortal, vibrant, glowing, fair,
Reconstituted face and form,
The loved ones left so still and cold
Will spring forth young and warm

To grasp the hands of those who wait—
Transformed before the saving King—
O Death, where is thy victory now?
And now, O Grave, where is thy sting?

And then that risen throng will shout
Above their ancient havens' rough,
'When we survey the wondrous cross,
Our earthly pain was cheap enough!'

A thrill electric lifts their hearts,
A breath divine expands their souls,
For they were blind, but now they see;
Were lame, but now made whole!

REFERENCES

- ¹ *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 159.
- ² D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria*, I, par. 772.
- ³ *SDA Bible Dictionary*, "Tiglath-pileser."
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, "Pul"; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 61.
- ⁵ J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 284B.
- ⁶ *The Cambridge Ancient History*, III, p. 272.
- ⁷ Shabaka is dated no earlier than 715 B.C. Still later dates are recognized.
- ⁸ *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, pp. 87, 150.
- ⁹ Luckenbill, *op. cit.*, II, par. 195; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 87.
- ¹⁰ R. W. Rogers, *History of Babylonia and Assyria*, I, pp. 334, 335.
- ¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 339. (Italics supplied.)
- ¹² Luckenbill, *op. cit.*, I, par. 611.
- ¹³ *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 159.
- ¹⁴ *SDA Bible Dictionary*, "Benhadad."
- ¹⁵ White, *op. cit.*, p. 459.
- ¹⁶ *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 152.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.
- ¹⁹ D. A. Courville, *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications*. These volumes are obtainable through Adventist Book Centers or directly from Crest Challenge Books, Box 993, Loma Linda, California 92354 (\$9.95 per set, two volumes, postpaid).

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I found a new dimension

I no longer sit and stare out of the car window, fretting at my husband for being overly long at his business.

By EDNA OLSEN

Periodically my local church conducts a program of systematically distributing *Steps to Christ* in our city, generally on Sabbath afternoons. On these occasions I used to make bright resolutions really to do my part. But, as my mother frequently said, "Promises are like pie crust, easily broken." Unexpected company had a way of dropping in Sabbath afternoons, or, I'm ashamed to say, I would even fall asleep in the easy chair just before it was time to leave for church!

Edna Olsen is a homemaker living in Floral City, Florida.

Most of the time, though, I would start out with high hopes. With 24 copies in my hand and only two hours in which to distribute them, I would hurry from door to door. The results were unsatisfactory. One day it dawned on me that I shouldn't leave the task of distributing *Steps to Christ* until Sabbath afternoons; rather, I should make it a part of my daily life.

I resolved that each time I would go on errands around the neighborhood, into town shopping, or on business, I would take a few *Steps to Christ* booklets with me, plus

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