

Chapter 7: The prophet Isaiah.

c.2000BC	Abraham
c.1440	Ten plagues, Moses leads Israelites out of Egypt
c.1400	Israelites cross the Jordan, enter Canaan, conquer Jericho
1375-1050	'Judges' lead the Israelites
1050-931	Saul, David and Solomon are first three kings of Israel, ruling the united kingdom
931	Israel divided in two parts: southern kingdom of Judah, northern kingdom of Israel
883-612	Neo-Assyrian empire period
740-680	The prophet Isaiah active
723	Assyrians destroy northern kingdom of Israel and its capital Samaria
715-686	Hezekiah is king of southern kingdom of Judah (or 728-697)
703	Hezekiah recovers from illness, receives embassy from Babylon (or 712): Is. 38-39
701	Sennacherib of Assyria attacks Jerusalem; because his army dies, he retreats to Nineveh; Isaiah chapters 36-37
686-642	Manasseh is king of southern kingdom of Judah; he forsakes Yahweh and worships idols (or 697-642)
612BC	Babylon and its allies attack Nineveh, destroy Assyrian empire

A week had passed quickly, so it seemed to Professor Ho. Xiao Wang entered looking thoughtful, followed by Xiao Li. After a brief exchange of greetings, Professor Ho got down to the point.

"Xiao Wang, I recall you said you weren't convinced that the Bible really does predict the future." Professor Ho spoke in a friendly tone.

Xiao Wang hesitated a moment before replying. Having broken free from the prison of atheism, he knew there was a supernatural Creator. It stood to reason that He might be able to foresee the future, and that the Bible might record prophetic revelations from God. But Xiao Wang was still a long way from confident about that. At the same time, he was increasingly convinced that the Bible's ancient history really was reliable, at least as far as he had examined it. Finally he answered Professor Ho, "I don't know. But I'd be interested in hearing the evidence."

Professor Ho's face split into a big smile. "Exactly!" he said happily. "That's the attitude of a reasonable person seeking the truth: examine the evidence! And, I earnestly believe, that's the attitude God wants from us. As Jesus said, 'seek and you will find' [Matthew 7:7]. So not surprisingly, He's left us with a lot of evidence."

"So can we start talking about fulfilled prophecy today?"

"Yes, certainly. But we need to keep talking about the historical evidence, too."

"Why?" interrupted Xiao Li. Xiao Li had been a Christian since he was in his teens, and at times the way Professor Ho and Xiao Wang discussed details seemed tedious and unnecessary to him.

Professor Ho turned to him. "You see Xiao Li," he explained, "in addition to showing that the Bible is true history, the historical details also help us to confirm the date when the books were composed."

"Why does that matter?"

"We need at least a rough idea of when the prophecies were written so we can be sure they were made before the events which fulfill them happened."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Xiao Wang. He was always surprised, and a little bit irritated, that Xiao Li couldn't seem to understand why he found it so hard to accept Christianity.

"So today," continued Professor Ho, "let's look at the second longest book of prophecy in the Bible: Isaiah."

After David and Solomon's rule: The divided kingdom (c.931-721 BC).

"After Solomon died, the kingdom was split into the southern kingdom of Judah ruled by Solomon's son Rehoboam and the northern kingdom of Israel, ruled by a man named Jeroboam. Sadly, both of them led their kingdoms into idolatry, incurring God's judgment, especially in the form of invasion and oppression from foreign nations.

"The northern kingdom of Israel plunged further and faster into idolatry than the southern kingdom of Judah.

Jeroboam [first king of the northern kingdom of Israel] said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will return to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah." So the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt." He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. [1 Kings 12:26-30 NAS]

King Jeroboam built two worship centers in the northern kingdom to compete with the temple at Jerusalem in the southern kingdom. Just such a worship center or 'high place' has been found in the relevant layers at the ancient site of Dan in northern Israel. Archaeologists believe it is the one made by Jeroboam I in the late 10th century BC, then later enlarged by King Ahab in the 9th century and possibly again by Jeroboam

*****PICTURE:** The excavated altar area at Dan in northern Israel.

II in the 8th century.^{1,2} Dig and you will find it!

“The northern kingdom of Israel is sometimes called Samaria because the capital was established there by the sixth ruler, Omri who reigned c.885-874 BC. The Bible says he purchased a hilltop from a landowner and founded a new city there:

In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king over Israel and reigned twelve years; he reigned six years at Tirzah. He bought the hill Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; and he built on the hill, and named the city which he built Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill. [1 Kings 16:23 NAS]

What the Bible says about the origin of the city has been confirmed by haeology. In many, many of the ancient cities in Palestine, if you dig below the Israelite layers you find hundreds of years of prior occupation. We’ve already discussed that with Jericho, Jerusalem and Gezer, for example. But not in Samaria. It has been extensively excavated. The lowest layer is dated to the 9th century, the time of Omri—just as the Bible indicates.³ Dig and you will find it!

“The two divided kingdoms were not able to maintain hegemony over all of the surrounding small people groups that David and Solomon had ruled. The country of Moab is a case in point; control was sporadic. Apparently at least two kings of the northern kingdom of Israel had controlled Moab, Omri, who reigned c.885-874 BC, and his son Ahab, who reigned c.874-853 BC.

Now Mesha king of Moab was a sheep breeder, and used to pay the king of Israel 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams. But when Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. [2 Kings 3:4-5 NAS]

This tiny detail has been confirmed by an inscription left by the king of Moab. In 1868 AD, a German missionary in what is today the country of Jordan was told by an Arab sheik about a black stone with letters carved on it. It proved to be the famous Moabite Stone, carved sometime after 853 BC by the king of Moab:

I, Mesha...king of Moab...made this high place for [the god] Chemosh...because he saved me from all the kings and caused me to triumph over all my adversaries. As for Omri, king of Israel, he humbled Moab many years.... And his son followed him and he also said “I will humble Moab.” ...but I have triumphed...over his house, while Israel has perished forever! Now Omri had occupied the land of Medeba, and Israel had dwelt there in his time...^{4, A, 5}

The inscription goes on to boast of victories over Israel. This extra-Biblical historical record from a foreign country strikingly confirms the details in the Bible: Moab had been under the northern kingdom of Israel’s control, and they successfully rebelled under a king named Mesha. It also complements the Bible’s record by giving us the additional information that Omri had apparently had to re-conquer Moab, implying that Moab had gotten free of Israelite control during the period immediately following the division of the kingdom.

After David and Solomon: The resurgence of Assyria and Egypt.

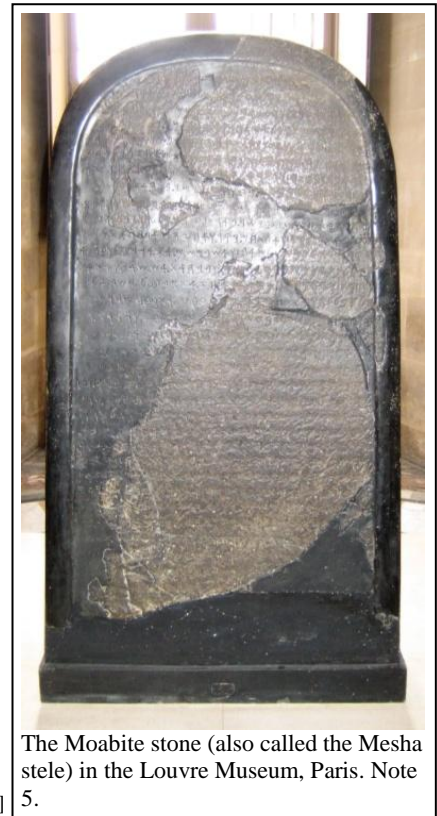
“After Solomon’s death, not only did the Israelites begin losing control of the smaller nations around them, but the entire political landscape in the ancient near east changed radically. Both Egypt and Assyria revived and became aggressive outside their own borders.

“You recall Solomon had made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh, marrying his daughter and receiving the city of Gezer which she brought with her as dowry [see Chapter 6 and 1Kings 9:16]. The weak native Egyptian dynasty 21 of David and Solomon’s day was overthrown in about 945 BC by Libyan invaders who established Egyptian dynasty 22. The first ruler of that dynasty, Sheshonq I, called ‘Shishak’ in the Bible, invaded Palestine, doing great damage to the Jews.

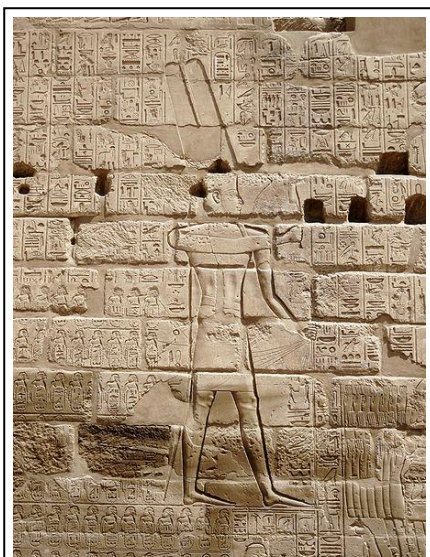
1 When the kingdom of Rehoboam was established and strong, he and all Israel [i.e. southern kingdom of Judah] with him forsook the law of the LORD. 2 And it came about in King Rehoboam's fifth year, because they had been unfaithful to the LORD, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem ... 4 He captured the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem. [2 Chronicles 12:1-4 NAS]

Sheshonq left a list of his conquests in Palestine carved on a temple wall in Egypt. Regrettably, some of the names have broken off and others eroded to the point of illegibility. What remains, however, confirms that Sheshonq I marched north through the southern kingdom of Judah and deep into the northern kingdom of Israel.

^A For readers with an eye for detail who consult the entire original inscription, note that ‘son’ can also mean ‘grandson.’ The Moabite stone’s first use of ‘son’ probably refers to King Omri’s son King Ahab, while the second use of ‘son’ probably refers to one of King Omri’s grandsons, most likely King Joram (reigned c.852-841).



The Moabite stone (also called the Mesha stele) in the Louvre Museum, Paris. Note 5.



Pharaoh Sheshonq's (Shishak's) list of cities he conquered in Palestine carved on the Temple of Amun at Karnak. Note 5.

these petty kingdoms, to make sure they wouldn't be a threat to them. That's what I think Shoshenq did here."⁸

Professor Ho looked up. "Notice who is speaking here: a mainstream anthropologist from a major U.S. university, not a Christian apologist. And it's published in the American National Geographic magazine of all places! That's one of the most pro-Darwin publications in the world and has stridently preached evolution for a hundred years. But the archaeological findings reported here are in exact harmony with the Bible's record. So is the Egyptian record. That's two independent sources confirming the situation as described in the Bible. Dig—"

"—and you will find it," Xiao Wang interrupted and finished for him. "Professor Ho, I don't mean to be disrespectful, but why do you keep repeating that?"

Professor Ho smiled and chuckled at himself, then grew serious. "To emphasize a point. When you read a myth, or a legendary account, it might possibly mention a real city or a known historical figure. But you don't expect to be able to go to that city, dig through the ancient layers, and find detailed confirmation of the people, places and times described in the accounts. We don't dig in Guangzhou hoping to find the bones of five rams who came and started the city! But you can dig in Israel and the rest of the ancient near east and find confirmation of hundreds, maybe thousands, of the specific historical details recorded in the Bible. The Bible has *no* myth or legend; it is *all* real history.



King Jehu of Israel (center) kneeling in homage before the Assyrian king Shalmanezzer III. Panel from the 'black obelisk' of Shalmanezzer in the British Museum. Note 5.

Along the way, he almost certainly took Gezer; archaeologists excavating ancient Gezer found remains of a destruction which they attributed to Sheshonq's invasion.⁶ He even more certainly took Megiddo, and left behind a stela with his name on it dug up by excavators.⁷ Dig and you will find it!

"The invasion did enormous damage to the southern kingdom of Judah. Some of it was never recovered from. For example, the excavator of the copper mines we talked about last time [see Chapter 6], with a fortress and smelter dated to Solomon's time, found activity at the site stopped abruptly, apparently due to Sheshonq's invasion." Here Professor Ho pulled down a glossy magazine from his shelves and flipped it open and read:

[The excavators] found in this layer 22 date pits, which they [carbon 14] dated to the tenth century B.C., along with Egyptian artifacts such as a lion-headed amulet and a scarab, both from the time of the pharaoh Shoshenq I [i.e. Sheshonq I]. That ruler's invasion of the region shortly after Solomon's death is chronicled in the Old Testament and at the Temple of Amun at Karnak. "I definitely believe that Shoshenq disrupted metal production here at the end of the tenth century," says Levy [the leader of the excavation]. "The Egyptians in the Third Intermediate Period weren't strong enough to field an occupying force, which is why you don't see Egyptian bread molds and other material culture here. But they could organize some pretty big military campaigns—strong enough to upset

Jewish Kings Mentioned in Assyrian Records			
Assyrian king.	Reign.	Jewish king mentioned.	Reign.
Shalmanezzer III	858-24	(Omri) "son of Omri"	885-74
		Ahab	874-53
		Jehu	841-14
Tiglath-pileasar III	745-27	Menahem	752-42
		Pekah*	740-32
		Hoshea	732-23
		(Ahaz) "Jehoahaz"***	732-15
Sargon II***	721-705	(Omri) "House of Omri"	885-74
Sennacherib	705-681	Hezekiah****	715-686
Esarhaddon	681-69	Manasseh	686-42

*Also named in Isaiah 7:1. **Also named in Isaiah 1:1.
 Also named in Isaiah 20:1. *Also named in Isaiah 1:1 and throughout chapters 36-39. See Note 4, pgs.193-201 for translations of Assyrian records.

"Besides Egypt on the south, on the north the Assyrian Empire revived starting around 883 BC and began expansionist warfare. The Assyrians steadily extended their conquests southward for the next two centuries, controlling most of the fertile crescent by about 650 BC. They kept extensive written records of their conquests.

"During the period of this Neo-Assyrian Empire, 883-612 BC, the Bible records a total of 28 kings ruling in the Israelites' northern and southern kingdoms. Of these 28, the names of at least nine have been found in contemporary Assyrian records.



Ancient Assyrian carving of Sargon II with an official. Note 5.

The prophet Isaiah, c.740-681 BC.

“The Assyrian period forms the historical background for the life and prophecies of the prophet Isaiah.”

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz concerning Judah and Jerusalem, which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. [Isaiah 1:1 NAS]

The date range of events in the book of Isaiah runs from the year King Uzziah died, c.740 BC [see Isaiah 6:1], to the year Esarhaddon took the throne of Assyria, c.681 BC [see Isaiah 37:38]. It’s important to realize, boys, that the giving of the prophecies is embedded in a specific historical context—kings, alliances, battles, invasions. Records of these events appear independently in other historical documents besides the Bible. The events are real and they can be at least approximately dated. Fake ‘prophecies’ written hundreds of years later might be expected to contain any number of historical inaccuracies and anachronisms. The Bible has none. Although this is not ‘absolute proof’ of the date when the prophecies were given, it does provide important corroborating evidence. So the historical background matters not only to show that the Bible’s history is accurate, but also as supporting evidence that the text was written at the time it claims to have been.

Sargon II, king of Assyria, 721-705 BC

“Let’s look at a few examples of historical details which form an intrinsic part of the prophecies of Isaiah.

1 In the year that the commander [lit. tartan] came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him and he fought against Ashdod and captured it, 2 at that time the LORD spoke through Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go and loosen the sackcloth from your hips and take your shoes off your feet." And he did so, going naked^B and barefoot. 3 And the LORD said, "Even as My servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot three years as a sign and token against Egypt and Cush [Sudan and Ethiopia], 4 so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young and old, naked and barefoot with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. [Isaiah 20:1-4 NAS]

There are five details here I want to discuss:

1. The name ‘Sargon,’ king of Assyria.
2. The title of the ‘commander,’ literally ‘tartan,’ who went to Ashdod.
3. The conquest of Ashdod by the Assyrians.
4. The association of Egypt with Cush (Sudan and Ethiopia) at that time.
5. The predicted defeat of the Egyptians by the Assyrians.

1. “The most instructive, to me at least, is the single word ‘Sargon.’ The name of this king occurs only once in the Bible and was completely unknown from any other historical source or archaeological finding until 1843. This inclined some of the scholars of the first half of the nineteenth century to question whether such a king had ever even existed.^{9,10} They were following the usual attitude of academic critics: the history in the Bible is assumed to be false unless they have strong evidence from another source. Then in 1843 archaeologist found Sargon’s huge palace at Khorsabad, about 20 kilometers north of the site of ancient Nineveh in Iraq. Once more, the Bible was right and the skeptics were wrong.

2. “The word translated ‘commander’ in our Bible is actually a Hebrew transliteration, ‘tartan’ of an Assyrian word, ‘turtannu.’ It meant ‘second in rank,’ a military command position immediately below the king himself, as we learned from Assyrian records.¹¹

3. “Archaeologists have confirmed the conquest of Ashdod from Assyrian records¹² and by an Assyrian stele found at ancient Ashdod.¹³ The city was taken in 712-711



Human-headed winged bull from Sargon II’s palace. Carved from a single block of stone about four meters long by four meters high. Tons of rock solid evidence for the accuracy of the Bible! Note 5.

^B ‘[N]aked’ here possibly means stripped of outer clothing but still wearing an inner garment such as a loincloth.

BC, which enables us to date the prophecy.

4. “In 712, Egypt had recently been taken over by the Cushites, a people group based in parts of what is today Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia. The Cushites campaigned northwards, conquered Egypt and established Egyptian dynasty 25, which ruled from c.712-c.663 BC. That’s why Isaiah associates Cush with Egypt—a detail that would have been inaccurate a mere ten or so years earlier, and would have been inaccurate again a half a century later, when the Cushite dynasty was replaced by a native Egyptian one. It was only valid in that narrow historical period.

5. “The Jews of Isaiah’s day were allied with the Cushite Egyptian dynasty against the Assyrians, but this reliance on a pagan nation showed a lack of trust in the one true God. Isaiah warns them here that Egypt would lose. The Cushites and Egyptians were subsequently defeated by the Assyrians at the battle of Eltekeh in 701 BC.

“All of this precisely accurate historical detail is packed into just four verses in Isaiah’s prophecy—and this is just one example. What it communicates to me is, the text was written at that time, not compiled by people inventing or editing legends centuries later. And note that the history and the prophecy are integrated together.”

Assyrian conquests c.740-c.718 BC.

“Let me give you another example of accurate historical details embedded in the midst of Isaiah’s prophecies. God revealed to Isaiah that He Himself was allowing the Assyrians to be victorious because He was using them to discipline first the northern kingdom of Israel and afterwards the southern kingdom of Judah. The Assyrians, however, regarded Yahweh the God of the Jews as just the same as the idol gods of the other people groups whom they had conquered. Thus the Assyrians boasted that they would conquer Jerusalem just as they had conquered other heavily fortified capital cities, even though God predicted through Isaiah that they would fail. In a prophecy written sometime 718-701 BC, most likely during the years 703-701, Isaiah quotes the boasts of the Assyrians:

[The LORD says:] Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hands is My indignation, I send it against a godless nation and commission it against the people of My fury [the southern kingdom of Judah] to capture booty and to seize plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets. Yet it does not so intend, nor does it plan so in its heart, but rather it is its purpose to destroy and to cut off many nations. For it [Assyria] says, "Are not my princes all kings? Is not Calno [738 BC] like Carchemish [718 BC], or Hamath [720 BC] like Arpad [740 BC], or Samaria [721 BC] like Damascus [732 BC]? As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols, whose graven images *were* greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria, shall I not do to Jerusalem and her images just as I have done to Samaria and her idols?" [Isaiah 10:5-11 NAS]

Notice the dates I’ve added in brackets behind the names of the conquered cities. Those are the years in which the cities were taken by the Assyrians,¹⁴ plus or minus a year or two. Those dates have been determined from Assyrian and other historical records and archaeological findings. All were taken by the Assyrians, exactly as Isaiah says, and all were taken *before* the Assyrians besieged Jerusalem in 701 BC, exactly as Isaiah indicates. Following the passage just quoted, Isaiah predicts the failure of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem [see below for details]; the history and the prophecy are integrated.”

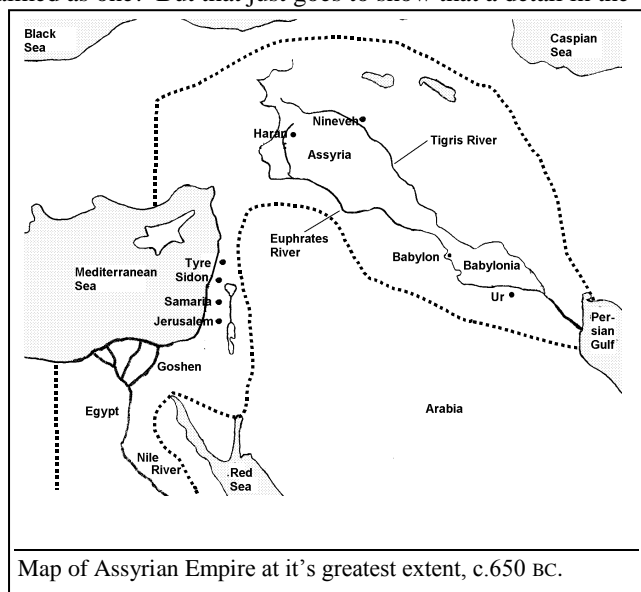
“There are hundreds of historical details in Isaiah which we could discuss,^C but I’m just choosing a few to illustrate a point. The archaeological findings for the Assyrian period are extremely extensive and richly confirm the historicity of the book of Isaiah. The book of Isaiah has no historical errors.”

“How do you know there aren’t any counter-examples?” asked Xiao Wang.

Professor Ho smiled at him. “King Sargon used to be claimed as one! But that just goes to show that a detail in the Bible which presently does not have external historical confirmation is simply waiting for the next turn of the archaeologist’s spade to provide evidence. Of course, we’ll never find external confirmation for *every* detail in the Bible—just as we couldn’t for any other old historical source. But the fact is that *none* of the Bible’s details have ever been conclusively demonstrated to be wrong—despite all the efforts of the unbelieving critical scholars for two hundred years!”

The southern kingdom of Judah’s alliance with Egypt

“Another example of detailed history integrated with prophecy in Isaiah is the alliance between Egypt and the southern kingdom of Judah at the time of Assyrian invasion. As we discussed a moment ago, the Cushite Egyptian dynasty 25 came to power about 712 BC. It was both expansionistic and worried about the Assyrians. It tried to establish a coalition with the small states of Palestine against Assyria. Isaiah records the coming of their embassy, most



Map of Assyrian Empire at its greatest extent, c.650 BC.

^C Interested readers are invited to consult the references at the end of the chapter.

likely around 704 BC:

Alas, oh land... which lies beyond the rivers of Cush, which sends envoys by the sea, even in papyrus vessels on the surface of the waters. Go, swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared far and wide, a powerful and oppressive nation whose land the rivers divide. [Isaiah 18:1-2 NAS]

The ‘envoys’ came from Egypt to Judah with an offer of alliance against Assyria. The offer was accepted and ‘swift messengers’ took the news back to Egypt and Cush. However, God did not approve of the Jews relying on Egypt for help and warned that it would fail:

"Woe to the rebellious children," declares the LORD, "Who execute a plan, but not Mine, and make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, in order to add sin to sin; who proceed down to Egypt without consulting Me, to take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore the safety of Pharaoh will be your shame and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt, your humiliation." [Isaiah 30:1-3 NAS]

The Assyrians found out about the Jews’ alliance with Egypt. Isaiah records their propaganda mocking the advancing Egyptians during the siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC:

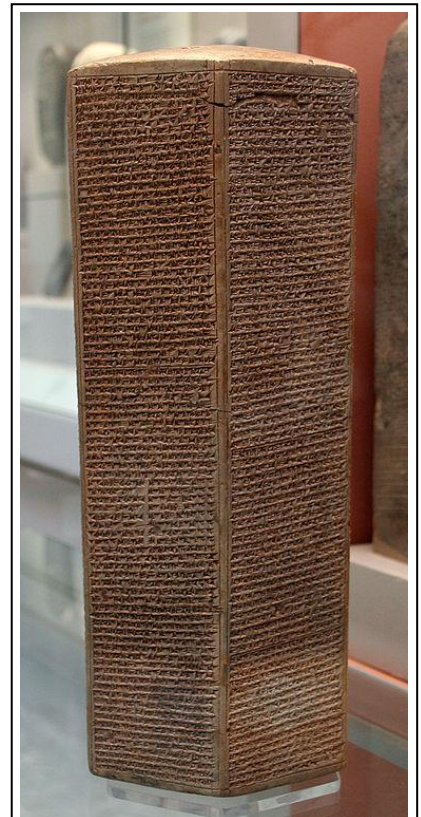
4 Then Rabshakeh [Assyrian chief officer] said to them [besieged Jews in Jerusalem], "Say now to Hezekiah, "Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria [Sennacherib], "What is this confidence that you have? ... 6 Behold, you rely on the staff of this crushed reed, *even* on Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who rely on him." ... 9 "How then can you repulse one official of the least of my master's servants and rely on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? [Isaiah 36:4, 6, 9 NAS]

Notice the three statements just quoted are taken from three different chapters scattered across the book of Isaiah. All of the prophecies of Isaiah are integrated with the historical details. Did the alliance really happen? Did the Egyptians lose as predicted? Let’s ask the Jews’ enemy, Assyria.

“The reliance on Cushite Egypt is noted by Sennacherib, the Assyrian king who besieged Jerusalem in 701 BC. His famous Sennacherib Cylinder inscription describes how a southern Palestinian coalition, including the city of Ekron and Hezekiah the Jew, were allied with Egypt:

The officials, the patricians and the people of Ekron—who had thrown Padi, their king [Sennacherib’s ally] into prison...and had handed him over to Hezekiah the Jew [who] held him in prison—had become afraid and had called on the kings of Egypt and the bowmen, the chariot corps and the cavalry of the king of Ethiopia [Cush], an army beyond counting—and they actually came to their assistance. In the plain of Eltekeh, their battle lines were drawn up against me...I fought with them and inflicted a defeat upon them.¹⁵

Sennacherib states that it was the people of Ekron who called on Egypt, but he also makes it clear Hezekiah was working in coordination with them, since he held their pro-Assyrian king captive for them—a point not noted in the Bible. Sennacherib’s inscription doesn’t contradict the Bible’s record; it simply focuses on different, complementary details. But the historical background of a Cushite Egyptian dynasty allied with southern Palestine against Assyria in the time of King Hezekiah is explicitly confirmed. Sennacherib’s inscription goes on to talk about the siege of Jerusalem, which is also detailed in the book of Isaiah.”



The ancient Assyrian Taylor Cylinder in the British Museum which contains an inscription of Sennacherib essentially equivalent to the Sennacherib Cylinder quoted in the text. Note 5.

The Assyrian invasion of the southern kingdom of Judah and siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC

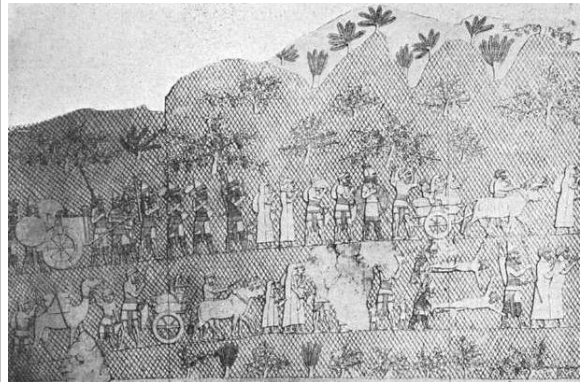
[Here read Isaiah chapters 36-37]

“The Assyrian invasion of the southern kingdom of Judah had been predicted by Isaiah in 732 BC—at a time when Judah was actually allied with Assyria:

7:17 The LORD will bring on you, on your people [southern kingdom of Judah], and on your father's house...the king of Assyria. ... 8:7 ...the king of Assyria [and his army]... 8 ...it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through, it will reach even to the neck; and the spread of its wings will fill the breadth of your land... [Isaiah 7:17, 8:7-8 NAS]

A little over thirty years later, the Assyrians attacked as predicted. They first besieged and conquered dozens of walled cities throughout Judah’s territory. The strongly fortified city of Lachish was one of the last holdouts:

Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them. And the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem to King Hezekiah with a large army.... [Isaiah 36:1-2 NAS]



Scenes from the relief carving found in Sennecherib's place which depicts the siege of Lachish. Seige.1. Assyrian archers attacking Lachish. 2. Assyrians carrying away captives and spoil from Lachish. Note 5.

As the Bible indicates, Sennacherib king of Assyria was besieging the city of Lachish and sent his 'Rabshakeh' to Jerusalem to besiege it. By the way, the term 'Rabshakeh' is not a name but the Hebrew transliteration of the Assyrian term 'rab-sha-qu.' This word is known from Assyrian inscriptions and means something like 'chief officer.' According to Assyrian records, a rab-sha-qu was sometimes placed in independent charge of an army, exactly as we see in this passage.¹⁶ Even the minor details of the Bible's record are accurate.

Sennacherib succeeded in taking Lachish, despite its fortifications and the determination of its defenders. The resistance put up by the Jews was fierce; archaeologists have found both the siege ramp built by the Assyrians and a counter-ramp built inside the city by the people of Lachish to oppose the Assyrians' ramp!¹⁷ Sennacherib was so proud of the hard won victory that he had an enormous relief depicting the battle sculpted on the walls of his palace. In his records, he boasts about the conquests:

As for Hezekiah, the Jew who did not submit to my yoke, forty-six of his strong walled cities, as well as the small cities in their neighborhood, which were without number – by constructing rampart out of trampled earth and by bringing up battering rams, by the attack of infantry, by tunnels, breaches (and the use of axes), I besieged and took. Two hundred thousand one hundred and fifty men, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, oxen and sheep without number I brought out from them, I counted as spoil. (Hezekiah) himself I shut up like a caged bird in Jerusalem, his royal city; the walls I fortified against him, and whosoever came out of the gates of the city, I turned back.¹⁸

Notice one claim the boastful king of Assyria *doesn't* make: Sennacherib never claims in any of his records that he took Jerusalem. That's because he didn't! No doubt he would have far rather have adorned the walls of his palace with a record of taking the capital city, rather than just the fortress of Lachish, and would rather have sculpted a picture of the Jewish king Hezekiah kneeling before him, not just some people from Lachish. But it didn't happen that way—just as the Bible records. The Rabshakeh's siege of Jerusalem failed and Sennacherib returned to Assyria, as Isaiah had predicted:

[Isaiah said,] "Therefore, thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, 'He will not come to this city or shoot an arrow there; and he will not come before it with a shield, or throw up a siege ramp against it. By the way that he came, by the same he will return, and he will not come to this city,' declares the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'" Then the angel of the LORD went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home and lived at Nineveh. [Isaiah 37:33-37 NAS]

As usual, the Assyrians left no record of their reversals. Sennacherib doesn't mention the plague but instead put the best face on the withdrawal that he could by noting he had 'shut up' Hezekiah in Jerusalem. But Hezekiah and the southern kingdom of Judah retained their independence, and, as one archaeologist notes, 'subsequent Assyrian rulers did not invade the fortified centers of Judea.'¹⁹

"What we've discussed here today is just a small sampling of the historical details in the book of Isaiah which have been confirmed by sources outside the Bible. You can research it in more depth if you like. But I think the point is clear: the history in the book of Isaiah is true and minutely accurate."

Then why don't the academics believe the Bible's history?

Xiao Wang was bothered by a question. "Professor Ho, since there's all this evidence for the historicity of the Bible, why do most scholars deny that it was written when it claims to have been?"

"An excellent question! Here I need to let you in on the dirty little secret of the academic world: most professors never question what they were taught as undergrads!

"It all goes back to 18th century Europe, the period of what is wrongly called the 'Enlightenment.' It was actually a 'Benighted-ment!' The idea of social evolution had been developed in the 18th century by thinkers such as Kant and Hegel. All human society was seen as developing through stages—including its religious beliefs. Those ideas were



Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918). Ignored archaeological data while denying the historicity of the Old Testament. Note 5.

further developed by some of the intellectual elite in 19th century Europe. Christianity was claimed to be just a set of human religious ideas gradually developed by society, and the Bible was seen as a compilation of myths and legends reflecting a certain social background. In Europe at that time there was a background of a general belief in the historicity of the Bible. Those holding the historical evolutionary view directly repudiated that belief and claimed that the Bible was full of historical errors and had been stitched together over centuries from a core of legends. They didn't do this because they had discovered any historical evidence against the Bible. They simply *assumed* it was false, based on the social evolutionary historical viewpoint which they had accepted.^D One writer describes it this way:

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 [in 1805] 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...; 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 [in 1878] 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 [Old Testament] canon....²⁰

"So what did they do when the archaeological evidence started coming in?" asked Xiao Li.

Professor Ho smiled grimly and shook his head. "By that time the 'evolutionary' view of the Bible was already firmly entrenched in academia. What do entrenched academics do with evidence that contradicts their favorite theories? They ignore it! The key 19th century figure in propagating the theory that the Bible was myth was a German named Wellhausen. He's a good example of what happened."

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 [writing in 2003] 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"....²¹

"Kenneth Kitchen, quoted above, is an archaeologist, one of the premier Egyptologists of our time.^E His point is that scholars who rejected the historicity of the Bible in the 19th and 20th centuries did so *in spite of* the historical evidence amassed by the advances of archaeology. And, writing in the year 2003, he notes that in the 21st century the universities are full of 'disciples' who still believe and preach that the Bible is a product of social evolution. They are as 'equally resistant' to archaeological findings as their 19th century predecessors."

Xiao Wang remembered his history classes. "My textbooks all said that religion, including the Bible, started as a pre-scientific explanation of natural phenomena, and then evolved according to needs of society or the desires of the dominant classes."

Professor Ho nodded in understanding. "Yes, that's the blind prejudice of the 19th century passed down uncritically into the 21st. But with the amount of evidence available to us now, I must say that there is a *willful* ignorance here. As the Bible says, they are 'suppressing the truth' [Romans 1:18] that they *could* know if they chose to.

"Well, Xiao Wang, now you've tasted a little bit of the evidence. Which seems more reasonable to you? The 19th century speculations, or the history of the Bible?"

"I'm beginning to think it's historically accurate," said Xiao Wang slowly. "But



Kenneth Kitchen (1932-). Egyptologist. Note 5.

^D See Note 10, [The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict](#), chapters 19 and 20 for a discussion of this.

^E Interested readers may consult Note 7, Dr. Kitchen's 2003 book [On the Reliability of the Old Testament](#).

how can I know it's from God?"

Professor Ho smiled broadly. "Because Isaiah really was a prophet—and his prophecies have come true!"

Fulfill prophecy is evidence that the Bible was inspired by God

Professor Ho sat up in his chair and spoke animatedly. "This is the third step in our logical proof of Christianity: fulfilled prophecy shows that the Bible is a revelation from God.

"Our use of prophecy to demonstrate inspiration is really exactly like what we call the scientific method—though really that method is just an application of inductive logic and is not unique to natural science. We have a theory which claims to explain a phenomenon. The theory makes a prediction. We then do experiments and make observations, to see whether what the theory predicts actually happens. If what the theory predicts is observed to happen, we say the theory has received confirmation. If it doesn't, the theory has been disconfirmed, refuted.

"A classic example is Einstein's theory that light rays would be bent by gravity when they were near massive objects. To test this theory, in 1919 a group of scientists went to the island of Principe of the west coast of Africa to observe a solar eclipse which allowed them to see whether light passing near the sun was bent. They observed that light was bent. The theory received confirmation when what it predicted was observed to happen.

"The predictions of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory form a good contrast. Darwin's theory predicted that there must have been tens of thousands of transitional forms in the course of millions of years of evolution. These should have left fossils. In Darwin's day, he claimed that the fossil record was still too scarce—he hoped examples would be found later. After another 150 years of searching, no undisputed transitional fossils have been found, despite textbook claims to the contrary. [See chapter 1.] If Darwin's theory were true, we should have found hundreds or thousands of examples by now—not just a couple of dubious claims! Instead what was really found were more and more radically *different* kinds of organisms, which would require *still more* transitional forms if the evolution theory were true. But no transitional forms are observed. Darwin's theory has received disconfirmation.

"I applied this same approach to the testing the inspiration of the Bible. There is a theory: that the phenomenon called 'the Bible' is a revelation from God who knows the future. The theory makes a prediction: prophecies in the Bible made long before the events they predict will come true. I tested the prediction by making observations: are datable prophecies fulfilled by subsequent events in history? If they are, that provides confirmation."

"But maybe that's just by chance," Xiao Wang objected.

"I would think that too," agreed Professor Ho, "if there were only one or two. In all scientific research, just one or two examples aren't enough. It needs to be a repeatable observation. Certainty grows gradually as more and more observations are accrued. So too for the Bible. There are hundreds of fulfilled prophecies. One theologian counted a total of 737, of which about 600 have already been fulfilled, with the remaining ones related to the endtimes.²² Of course, the most convincing are the very long term prophecies, ones that came true hundreds or thousands of years after they were made. There are dozens of these; I'd like to look at a few of them with you today and in the coming weeks." [See chapters 8-9, 11, and 13-15.]

"God Himself encourages us to take this approach. In the book of Isaiah we are told that God inspired prophetic predictions so people could know that He is real and is in control of human history. God challenged the imaginary gods whose idols the Jews were worshipping to prove their deity by making predictions:

21 "Present your case," the LORD says. "Bring forward your strong arguments," the King of Jacob says. 22 Let them [false gods, idols] bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place... announce to us what is coming; 23 declare the things that are going to come afterward, that we may know that you are gods... [Isaiah 41:21-23 NAS]

The idols, of course, could not predict the future, but God pointed out that He had done so, fulfilling predictions written in the Bible long before the time of Isaiah:

3 "I [the LORD] declared the former things long ago and they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them. Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. ... 5 ...I declared them to you long ago, before they took place I proclaimed them to you... [Isaiah 48:3, 5 NAS]

God said that He was continuing to make predictions about the future through Isaiah:

"Behold, the former things have come to pass, now I [the LORD] declare new things; before they spring forth I proclaim them to you." [Isaiah 42:9 NAS]

700 years later, in the New Testament, Jesus said the same thing to His disciples when He predicted His own death and resurrection:

Now I [Jesus] have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. [John 14:29 NAS]

The point is clear: God has left us prophecies in the Bible to prove to us that the writers were inspired by Him."

Xiao Wang nodded. "That's what I want to examine!"

Isaiah's prediction of the permanent end of the northern kingdom of Israel: Fulfilled after 65 years.

[Here read Isaiah 7-8]

"You recall that by Isaiah's time the Jews had been divided into two kingdoms for 200 years, the northern kingdom

of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Isaiah lived in the south. In 732 BC, the northern kingdom of Israel allied with the Aram, the modern Syria, and attacked the southern kingdom of Judah:

Now it came about in the days of Ahaz...king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Aram [Syria]^F and Pekah...king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not conquer it. [Isaiah 7:1 NAS]

This event allows us to set the date of when the prophecy was given, because the only year that all three of these kings were reigning at the same time was 732 BC. Isaiah predicted that the invasion would fail, which it did. But he was also inspired to add another important prediction: the permanent end of the northern kingdom of Israel.

...now within another 65 years Ephraim [northern kingdom of Israel] will be shattered, so that it is no longer a people... [Isaiah 7:8 NAS]

In the same section, Isaiah specifies that Assyria will attack the northern kingdom of Israel:

4 ...the spoil of Samaria [capital of northern kingdom of Israel] will be carried away before the king of Assyria. ... 7 Now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates, even the king of Assyria and all his glory... [Isaiah 8:4, 7 NAS]

What Isaiah predicted, happened. The Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom, took over the entire region, and destroyed the capital of Samaria after a three year siege. The expansionist policies of the Assyrian empire included deporting substantial parts of the populations of conquered territories to distant lands and replacing them with peoples brought in from other areas. Their goal was to destroy their national identity in order to prevent any future rebellions. The Assyrians did this to the northern kingdom of Israel, as the Bible records:

6 In the ninth year of Hoshea [723 BC], the king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel away into exile to Assyria, and settled them in Halah and Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. ... 24 The king of Assyria brought men from Babylon and from Cuthah and from Avva and from Hamath and Sephar-vaim, and settled them in the cities of Samaria in place of the sons of Israel. So they possessed Samaria and lived in its cities. [2Kings 17:6, 24 NAS]

The Biblical record is specifically confirmed by the ancient Assyrian records dug up by archaeologists. In the annals of the Assyrian king Sargon II—you remember him, he's the one whom the 19th century critics thought might not have existed—we read:

I besieged and conquered Samaria, led away as booty 27,290 inhabitants of it.²³

[I rebuilt the city of Samaria] better than it was before and settled therein people from countries which I myself had conquered. I placed an officer of mine as governor over them and imposed upon them tribute as is customary for Assyrian citizens.²⁴

The result was, within 65 years, the mixed population of the area no longer regarded themselves as Israelites. This fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy in 7:8."

Xiao Wang wasn't satisfied. "Professor Ho, I do see here, again, the accuracy of the Bible's history. And as an example of fulfilled prophecy it might have been very convincing to the people who lived in Isaiah's time, because they could watch it happen. They could be sure the prophecy came before the fulfillment. But I can't know that for sure after over 2,000 years!"

Professor Ho only smiled and nodded as usual. "Precisely! So let's look at a longer term example—one where the fulfillments didn't begin until long after the prophet's death."

Isaiah's prediction of the Babylonian captivity of the southern kingdom of Judah: Fulfilled over 100 years later

[Here read Isaiah 39.]

1 At that time Merodach-baladan son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered. 2 Hezekiah was pleased, and showed them all his treasure house, the silver and the gold and the spices and the precious oil and his whole armory and all that was found in his treasuries. There was nothing in his house nor in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them. ... 5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD of hosts, 6 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,' says the LORD. 7 'And some of your sons [i.e. descendants] who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.'" [Isaiah 39:1-2, 5-7 NAS]

Here Isaiah unequivocally predicts events that happened over one hundred years later, at the time of the Babylonian captivity. Remember that Isaiah lived in the time of the Assyrian empire. Babylon had never been a threat to Israel in

^F 'Rezin the king of Aram' mentioned in the Bible here is referred to in an inscription of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III, who reigned c.744-727 BC. In the Assyrian inscription, he is called 'Rezon of Damascus,' Damascus being the capital of Aram (Syria). See Note 4 page 193. Once more, the right person is in the right place at the right time in the historical details of Isaiah's prophecies.



Merodach-baladan. Note 5.

it's entire history, and it was far too weak to be one in Isaiah's day. But here the prophet predicts Babylon will loot Jerusalem and carry off some of the royal household as hostages. What a surprising prediction to make in c.700 BC!

"According to historical sources outside the Bible, Merodach-baladan, the king who sent messengers to Hezekiah, ruled in Babylon independently of the Assyrians twice, from c.721-710 BC and again briefly, for nine months in 704-703 BC.²⁵ The sending of the embassy to Hezekiah probably occurred during his second reign. It might seem surprising that the distant king of Babylonia should be so tenderly concerned for the health of a minor Palestinian king whom he had never met! In fact, scholars agree that Merodach-baladan's ambassadors were seeking an alliance with Hezekiah against Assyria. If our dating is correct, Hezekiah was already in open revolt against Assyria at that time and allied with Egypt. No wonder he welcomed the ambassadors from Babylon!

"However, within a year of the prophecy, Merodach-baladan was defeated by the Assyrians, fled from Babylon, and died in exile. Two years later the Assyrians under Sennacherib attacked Judah, as we just discussed. It hardly seemed the moment for Isaiah to be predicting that Babylon would conquer Judah!

"Fifteen years after the prophecy, in c.689 BC, the city wall of Babylon was torn down by the Assyrian king Sennacherib, and he decreed that the site would remain desolate for 70 years, a full human lifetime. That would have made it seem even less likely that Isaiah's prophecy was going to be fulfilled.

"But Sennacherib's decrees were only human—not prophecies from God like Isaiah made. The next Assyrian king, Esarhaddon, began rebuilding Babylon in c.676 BC, and the following one, Ashurbanipal, built there too. Still, Babylon was strictly subordinate to Assyria. There was no sign of Isaiah's prophecy coming true.

"In 625 BC, three quarters of a century after Isaiah's prophecy, the Babylonians revolted and threw off the Assyrian domination, beginning a meteoric rise to power. Allied with the Medes, they destroyed the Assyrians in 612 BC, established their own empire, and eventually invaded the kingdom of Judah in 605. Deportation of Jews and looting of treasure by the Babylonians in 605 and 597 BC, and especially the total sacking of Jerusalem in 586 BC, thoroughly fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy made 100 and more years earlier. The prophecy that would have seemed so unlikely on the day it was made came true. [See chapter 8.]

"So what do you think, Xiao Wang?" Professor Ho asked.

"More impressive than the 65 year example," admitted Xiao Wang, "but it still seems to leave room for doubt. How can I know the text was written before the fulfillment?"

"Yes, I thought you might feel that way. How about a longer term example?"

"How long?"

"Eight hundred years till fulfillment even begins; 2,500 years till it really gets under way!"

Xiao Wang gave a quick nod and said, "Let's hear that one!"

Isaiah's prediction of the worldwide spread of Christianity: Fulfillment began 800 years later

Professor Ho flipped to near the front of his Bible. "You will remember that when we discussed Abraham, we saw God had promised to bless the world through his offspring:

1 Now the LORD said to Abram [Abraham] ... 3 "...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." [Genesis 12:1, 3 NAS]

15 Then...the LORD called to Abraham... 18 "And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed...." [Genesis 22:15, 18 NAS]

Abraham wasn't told how that blessing would spread to all the world. Of course, it came through his greatest descendant, Jesus Christ, as we discussed before. [See Chapter 4.] In Isaiah, the predictions about Jesus Christ and the spread of Christianity become much more explicit.

"Woven throughout the book of Isaiah are emphatic predictions that Yahweh, the God of the Jews, would be worshipped by non-Jews from every nation and ethnicity in the world. In particular, it is prophesied that God's special 'Servant,' the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would bring God's forgiveness and salvation to people across the globe. We don't have time today to prove that Jesus is the predicted Messiah; that will have to wait for another day. [See chapters 11-14.] For now I just want to point out that Isaiah unequivocally insisted that the God of the Jews would be worshipped the world over." Professor Ho flipped to the middle of his Bible and read:

1 "Behold, My Servant [Messiah, Jesus Christ], whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. ... 4 He will not be disheartened or crushed until He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law. ...

6 I am the LORD, I have called you [Messiah, Jesus Christ] in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations," [Isaiah 42:1, 4, 6 NAS]

1 Listen to Me, O islands, And pay attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called Me [Messiah, Jesus Christ] from the womb; from the body of My mother He named Me. ... 3 He said to Me, "You are My Servant...in Whom I will show My glory." ... 5 And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (for I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength), 6 He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." 7 Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One, to the despised One, to the One abhorred by the nation, to the Servant of rulers, "Kings will see and arise, princes will also bow down, because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You." [Isaiah 49:1, 3, 5-7 NAS]

13 Behold, My Servant [Messiah, Jesus Christ] will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. 14 ...His appearance was marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men. 15 Thus He will sprinkle many nations, kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; For what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand. [Isaiah 52:13-15 NAS]

Professor Ho looked up from his reading. "As I said a moment ago, the 'Servant' mentioned above is Jesus Christ, the 'Messiah' of the Jews. [See chapter 13.] It is an indisputable historical fact that it was through the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ the worship of Yahweh, the God of the prophet Isaiah, spread throughout the world, thus fulfilling this prophecy.

"Consider how incredible these prophecies are! Who would have thought that all over the world there would be people willing to worship Yahweh, the God of the tiny, weak nation of Israel? Who could have imagined that distant people groups would acknowledge Yahweh's 'Servant,' the Jews' 'Messiah,' Jesus Christ? In Isaiah's time, nobody except a few of the immediately surrounding nations had even heard of the name of Yahweh—and those few regarded Him as strictly a Jewish 'god.'

"Consider the situation when the prophecy was made. The northern kingdom of Israel had already been destroyed and the southern kingdom of Judah had received a crippling blow from the Assyrian invasion. Even worse, in Isaiah's latter years, the southern kingdom of Judah was ruled by an evil king named Manasseh^G who abandoned worship of Yahweh and led the entire nation into idolatry. At that time, it seemed that the religion of Yahweh would soon face extinction. Who at that time could have foreseen that it would spread from that tiny nation to every place in the world?

"After Isaiah's time, things got even worse, culminating in the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC. The Jewish population was decimated, most of the survivors were exiled to distant lands, and the Temple of Yahweh was destroyed by idol worshipping Gentiles. It looked like the end.

"But it couldn't be the end, because God had already foretold the future through Isaiah and other prophets.

"The fulfillment of the prophecy did not begin until after the 'Servant,' Jesus Christ, rose from the dead in 30 AD. After that that gospel, the 'good news' about God's 'Servant' Jesus, began to be preached to non-Jewish nations. That was the start, but the prophecy demands a spread 'to the end of the earth.' Christianity didn't really even begin to be a worldwide religion until after the modern missionary movement started around 1800 AD. That's 2,500 years after Isaiah's prophecy! How could he have foreseen that one day, from the northern edge of Europe to the southern tip of Africa, from North America to South America, across the Pacific islands and in Australia, and almost everywhere in Asia, including every province of China, there would be countless people worshipping Yahweh's 'Servant,' Jesus Christ? But that's the reality today; there are only a few places or people groups left in the world which have no known Christians. That wasn't the case even 200 years ago."

Are the Bible's prophecies self-fulfilling?

Xiao Wang was thoughtful. But as usual, doubts still rose in his mind. "Professor Ho, how do you know it didn't happen just because people read the prophecies and decided to fulfill them? What the psychologists call self-fulfilling prophecies?"

Professor Ho nodded. "I see your problem. You don't understand yet how it actually happened in history. What really happened was the people in Jesus's time first saw Him fulfill many other prophecies made by Isaiah and others, including working miracles, dying on the cross, and rising from the dead. [See chapters 12-14.] After that they believed in Him and were willing to spread the gospel. In other words, first came conviction based on evidence, then came the human activities which would eventually fulfill the prophecies about the spread of Christianity.

"You see, things don't happen in history just because someone once made a prediction—not even if lots of people believe in it! During World War II, Hitler and the Nazis arrogantly predicted that the empire they were establishing would last a thousand years. They claimed they were the most highly evolved people group and that it was a historical necessity that they conquer and rule over the 'lower peoples' and 'slave races.' It was all nonsense of course, but tens of millions of Europeans—not only Germans, but also millions of people from other nations—believed in it to the point

^G Reigned c.686-642 BC; see 2Kings 21, 2Chronicles 33.

of being willing to sacrifice, suffer and die for it. In the end, however, Hitler's prophesied 'Thousand Year Reich' only lasted twelve and a half years. Merely uttering a prophecy and convincing lots of people to believe it isn't enough to make it happen.

"Finally, if you read the Bible, you will find that many of the prophecies were fulfilled by people who probably knew nothing about them and certainly didn't care that they were fulfilling them! The Assyrians didn't consult Isaiah before they deported the Jews of the northern kingdom of Israel and resettled the area with immigrants. King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon wasn't reading the Jews' book of Isaiah when he decided to invade the southern kingdom of Judea. And the Romans much later, in 30 AD, weren't interested in fulfilling Isaiah 53 or Psalm 22 when they nailed Jesus to the cross. [See chapter 13.]

"The bottom line is this: prophecies made by humans rarely come true; when they are long term or global in scope, they almost *never* come true. But *all* of the prophecies in the Bible, short term and long term, global and local, have been fulfilled—except the ones relating to the endtimes, which will happen later."

Xiao Wang remembered his history and politics classes. He had to admit that human predictions covering even a few decades almost invariably failed to come true. "You have a point," he admitted, "but you only have three examples from the Bible here, and only one of those is truly long term."

"Exactly!" agreed Professor Ho. "That wasn't enough to convince me. Just like in the natural sciences, one or two observations aren't enough to confirm a theory. But it turns out there are many, many examples of Biblical prophecies which were fulfilled in history—and not a single counterexample of a prophecy that didn't come true. I was convinced gradually as I examined prophecy after prophecy and the evidence accumulated.

"You see, we've only looked at a smattering of what's available. One scholar found 111 different prophecies in Isaiah, of which about 76 have been fulfilled and about 35 are about the endtimes.²⁶ In the future I hope to look at more of them with you, including:

- Isaiah 14, 43, 44, 48: return of the Jews from Babylon, fulfilled 539 BC [See chapter 8.]
- Isaiah 13-14: the destruction of Babylon, fulfilled by 1 BC (does not begin until after 275 BC) [See chapter 8.]
- Isaiah 7: virgin birth of the Messiah, Jesus, fulfilled c.4 BC [See chapter 11.]
- Isaiah 11: the Messiah, Jesus, to be a descendent of King David, fulfilled c.4 BC [See chapter 11.]
- Isaiah 40: the coming and message of John the Baptist preparing people for the Messiah Jesus, fulfilled 26 AD [See chapter 12.]
- Isaiah 35: miracles done by the Messiah, Jesus, fulfilled 26-30 AD [See chapter 12.]
- Isaiah 52-53: vicarious death of the Messiah, Jesus, fulfilled 30 AD [See chapter 13.]
- Isaiah 53: resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus, fulfilled 30 AD [See chapter 14.]

All of those, and many more in the book of Isaiah, have been explicitly fulfilled. The problem with fulfilled prophecies in the Bible isn't that there are too few to be confident; the problem is there are too many to study them all!"



Above: One of the caves at Qumran. Note 5.

Below: Excavations at Qumran. Note 5.



When was Isaiah written?

A problem occurred to Xiao Wang. "How do we know that the book of Isaiah was written before those events occurred?"

"I've been waiting for you to ask that question!" Professor Ho replied. "Everyone does, and it's perfectly reasonable, living as we do in a world full of fakes and lies. It turns out that our manuscript evidence for the book of Isaiah is wonderful, better than for most books of the Old Testament.

"Your question logically implies three questions:

1. How old are the oldest extant copies of Isaiah?
2. How long before that could the original have been written?
3. Are there prophecies in Isaiah fulfilled after that time?

In 1948-56, a fantastic series of manuscript discoveries was made in mountain caves on the shores of the Dead Sea in Israel. Archaeologists uncovered thousands of manuscript fragments dating from c.325 BC to 70 AD. A religious community of separatist Jews had lived at the site for several hundred years and produced a large library located in the caves. Portions of every Old Testament book except Esther were found. Perhaps the greatest treasure of all was a complete copy of the book of Isaiah dated to c.150-100 BC. All the experts—mostly unbelievers, by the way—are in agreement that it was copied before 100 BC, based on the shapes



Dead Sea Scrolls Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a), copied c.150-100 BC. Note 5.

of the letters and other factors.

“Let me add a word here about the accuracy of manuscript copying. Before this scroll was found, the oldest Hebrew copy of Isaiah we had dated from about 900 AD, a full thousand years later. Amazingly, when the scroll from c.150-100 BC was compared to the one from 900 AD, there were *no* significant differences—no major additions, deletions or different arrangements of the texts.²⁷ In the end, out of nearly 1,300 verses in Isaiah, there were fewer than ten places where the older text was needed to make corrections to manuscripts produced a thousand years and more after it,²⁸ and some of those were changes in a single word. None of them made any significant changes to the message of Isaiah. That gives us some idea of the scrupulous accuracy with which the Jews copied the manuscripts of the Old Testament.^H

“Back to the dating question. The Isaiah scroll from c.150-100 BC is just a copy. The original must be much older. Today, even the most obstinate of the unbelieving scholars will admit that the book of Isaiah was completed before 200 BC.²⁹ Of course, in reality it was written by Isaiah, and so we know it was completed sometime before 650 BC.”

“Do you have any more evidence?” asked Xiao Wang.

“Yes,” affirmed Professor Ho, “the book itself provides linguistic and historical evidence.^I

“The entire book of Isaiah is written in pure classical Hebrew. Books of the Old Testament written c.550 to 400 BC, like the books of Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah, often use the Aramaic language and have loanwords from Babylonian or Persian, which is quite different from the book of Isaiah.³⁰ Still later, non-Biblical Jewish writings from the period 400 to 200 BC often show even more Aramaic influence and begin to use loanwords from Greek. Isaiah has no Greek words.

“Furthermore, Isaiah’s contents fit a date prior to the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC. We have already sampled some of the detailed historical information about the Assyrian period contained in Isaiah. Many of those details were forgotten later—even king Sargon’s name was lost to later historians. Accurate, specific historical details belonging to the Assyrian period provide additional evidence that Isaiah could not have been composed hundreds of years later, like the critics claim it was.

“In addition to the details, the major emphases of the book of Isaiah also fit the period before the captivity of 586 BC. Throughout the book there are scathing denunciations of the idolatry being practiced by the Jews of Isaiah’s day:

4...are you not children of rebellion... 5 Who inflame yourselves among the oaks, under every luxuriant tree, who slaughter the children in the ravines, under the clefts of the crags? 6 "Among the smooth stones of the ravine is your portion, they are your lot; even to them you have poured out a drink offering, You have made a grain offering. Shall I [the LORD] relent concerning these things? 7 "Upon a high and lofty mountain you have made your bed. You also went up there to offer sacrifice. ... 13 "When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you. But the wind will carry all of them up, and a breath will take them away. But he who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land and will possess My holy mountain." [Isaiah 57:4-7, 13 NAS]

2 "I [the LORD] have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts, 3 A people who continually provoke Me to My face, offering sacrifices [to false gods] in gardens and burning incense on bricks; 4 Who sit among graves and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine's flesh, and the broth of unclean meat is in their pots. [Isaiah 65:2-4 NAS]

That’s the barest sampling; have a look through the book and you’ll find many more examples. Isaiah is constantly pointing out that the Jews of his time were worshipping false gods and were even sacrificing their children to idols [Isaiah 57:5]. Absolutely nothing like this was practiced again by the Jews after they returned to Israel in 539 BC. The Babylonian captivity completely cured them of their formerly inveterate idolatry. Thus the ‘post-exilic’ books of the Old Testament’ which describe the conditions after 539 BC make no mention of any idolatry among the Jews in Israel. That is in strong contrast to the ‘pre-exilic’ book of Isaiah which was completed long before the exile began in 586 BC.

^H For more on the accuracy of the manuscripts, see Note 10 (McDowell’s New Evidence that Demands a Verdict) chapter 4.

^I For a thorough discussion of the age and genuineness of Isaiah, see Note 29 (Archer’s A Survey of Old Testament Introduction), chapters 23 and 24.

^J The historical books Ezra and Nehemiah, and the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The historical situation in the book of Isaiah does not fit the post-exilic period.”

“Then why do the critics claim it was written much later?” Xiao Wang asked.

“A good question!” agreed Professor Ho. “At least part of the answer is because of the prophecies. Although the historical background of the book is the Assyrian period, Isaiah does predict many events which occurred much later, including the Babylonian captivity itself and the return of the Jews to the land of Israel. It is in part because of predictions like that that the critics insist Isaiah must have been written late. You need to understand the critics’ circular logic:

1. Major Premise: There is no such thing as prophecy revealed by God.
2. Minor Premise: The book of Isaiah contains detailed statements—prophecies—about events which occurred long after 680 BC.
3. Conclusion: The book of Isaiah must have been completed *after* those events occurred.

You see how it works? No prophecy can *ever* be a proof of inspiration for the critics because they will always claim it was must have been written long afterwards!”

“But that’s exactly what’s bothering me!” Xiao Wang exclaimed. He felt he could sympathize with those ‘critics’ whom he’d never met. “How do we know they weren’t added later?”

“I understand,” Professor Ho said with a nod. “It bothered me for a long time, too. But eventually I realized that I didn’t have to prove Isaiah was written before 680 BC to be sure that it contained inspired prophecies. As we noted above, everyone today agrees it was complete before 200 BC. But it contains prophecies fulfilled long after that! The prophecies about the worldwide spread of the worship of Yahweh and of His Servant, Jesus Christ, don’t begin to be fulfilled until long after 200 BC. Most of the other prophecies I just listed, including all the ones about Jesus Christ, also came true much later than 200 BC. There can be no doubt whatsoever that those prophecies were written in Isaiah *before* the events happened!”

The lesson of prophecy: God controls history

[Here read Isaiah chapter 10.]

“Fulfilled prophecies show us that the Bible was inspired by God. But they also teach us another important lesson: God is in control of human history.”

“I’ve always thought that human beings decide their own destiny and control the course of history,” Xiao Wang replied.

“Yes, we’ve been brought up to think that everything is decided by human will. But in reality, it is God who decides the outcomes of human choices and actions. Humans can’t even guarantee their next breath! Countless things which people have believed in and striven for have come to nothing, like the example of the Nazis I mentioned just now. Our strength is far too small to guarantee the future, and as a result we can almost never predict it. The overwhelming majority of human prophecies fail to come true, but all of the Bible’s do come true, because God is in charge of history.”

“But then why should we bother doing anything at all?” Xiao Wang objected. “‘God is in charge’ is the same thing as determinism or fate.”

Professor Ho shook his head. “No, there’s a huge difference, because God gives us real freedom to make real choices. [See chapter 2.] But He foresees those free choices and uses them to achieve the outcomes that He Himself decides on. And in many cases He makes His own actions conditional on ours. He decides the outcome of our choices, but He tells us beforehand what He will do in response to different human choices.”

“I don’t understand,” Xiao Wang said.

Professor Ho puckered his brow and tried again. “Perhaps an example will help. You can see God’s control and human freedom most clearly in the history of the nation of Israel. When they chose to sin, God punished them with invasion. If they repented, God restored their national prosperity and security. At the very beginning of Isaiah God gave the invitation to the sinful Jews of the both the northern and southern kingdoms:

“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken. [Isaiah 1:18-20 NAS]

Both kingdoms were sinful, including practicing idolatry and child sacrifice. But the northern kingdom of Israel was worse, and did not repent, so God wiped it out completely by means of the Assyrians. The southern kingdom of Judah was not quite as bad, and there was considerable repentance under king Hezekiah, so God only used the Assyrians to discipline them, but then allowed them to recover. In fact, while the Assyrians were besieging Jerusalem, God explicitly stated that it was because of His plan that they had been successful in their imperialistic conquests—and that they would fail to take Jerusalem because of His plan:

24 Through your servants you [the king of Assyria] have reproached the Lord, and you have said, ‘With my many chariots I came up to the heights of the mountains...’ 26 Have you not heard? Long ago I [the LORD] did it, from ancient times I planned it. Now I have brought it to pass, that you should turn fortified cities into ruinous heaps. 27 Therefore their inhabitants were short of strength, they were dismayed and put to shame... 28 But I know your sitting down and your going out and your coming in and your raging against Me. 29 Be-

cause of your raging against Me and because your arrogance has come up to My ears, therefore I will put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came. [Isaiah 37:24, 26-29 NAS]^K

What’s the proof that God controls history? Simply this: the fact that He predicts what will happen years or decades or centuries before it occurs—and then things *always* turn out just the way He said they would!”

Where is China in the prophecies?

“Did God predict the future of China?” Xiao Li asked excitedly.

Professor Ho smiled sympathetically. “We’d all like to see that, wouldn’t we? But God’s dealings with the world center around the nation of Israel and the Church of Jesus Christ, not China or other non-Jewish nations. China only appears in the Bible insofar as it falls under prophecies concerning the entire world, like Isaiah’s prediction that people the world over would worship the LORD and His Messiah, Jesus Christ. In that sense, Xiao Li, you and I are living fulfillments of prophecy—Chinese who believe in the God of the Jews, the true God who wrote the Bible.”

“But China is such a big, important nation with a long history...” Xiao Li couldn’t hide his disappointment.

Professor Ho smiled again, this time with a trace of amusement. “I understand; I used to feel that way too. But one day I was talking to a Christian from Canada and asked him why it was that China didn’t appear in the Bible. He replied by asking me if I had noticed Canada specifically referred to anywhere in the Bible—or even all of North and South America. ‘Of course not!’ I said. He smiled and asked me if *that* omission had ever bothered me. I was embarrassed and said nothing! In fact, I’d never been concerned about the absence of Canada or America or Mexico or Brazil from the Bible. My Canadian friend said that his country was included as a part of ‘the nations’ of the entire world. As Christians, we should not be arrogant about our own ethnic or cultural background.”

More fulfilled prophecies to come!

Xiao Wang spoke up. “Professor Ho, I understand your point that being able to predict the course of human history would show God is in control. But, to be honest, I’m not convinced yet that these prophecies really were revealed by God. You’ve shown me a couple of long term ones, but maybe those were just lucky.”

“You’re right,” Professor Ho agreed. “Just those couple wouldn’t have been enough to convince me either. But we’ve barely begun. If you can come again next week, I’d like to look at the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. We’ll add some more long term prophecies, as well as evidence about historical accuracy.”

Xiao Wang nodded his consent. “I’m pretty well convinced of the historicity of the Bible now, but I really want to see more proof that it was inspired by God.”

“See you next week then!”

¹ Unger, Merrill F., R.K. Harrison, Howard F. Vos and Cyril J. Barber. The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Revised and updated edition. Moody Press, 1988. Pg. 273.

² Free, Joseph R. and Howard F. Vos. Archaeology and Bible History, Revised Edition. Zondervan Publishing House, 1992. Pg.152-153.

³ Note 1, Pg.1116.

⁴ Pritchard, James B., Ed. The Ancient Near East Volume I, An Anthology of Texts and Pictures. Princeton University Press, 1958. Pg. 209-210.

⁵ Pictures from:

The Moabite stone: CC-BY Henri Sivonen from: [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mesha_Stele_\(511142469\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mesha_Stele_(511142469).jpg)

Sheshonq’s list of conquered cities: CC-BY Olaf Tausch from: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Karnak_Tempel_19

King Jehu kneeling in homage: Public Domain Willis from: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jehu-on-black-obelisk.jpg

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Human-headed winged bull: Zunkir from: zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Taureaudte.jpg

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One of the caves at Qumran: Effi Schweizer from: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Qumran.jpeg

Excavations at Qumran: Berthold Werner from: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Israel_Qumran_BW_4.JPG

⁶ Note 1, Pg. 470.

⁷ Kitchen, Kenneth A. On the Reliability of the Old Testament, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003. Pg. 33, 607.

⁸ Draper, Robert. “David and Solomon: Kings of Controversy.” *National Geographic*. December 2010. ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2010/12/david-and-solomon/draper-text/1

⁹ Note 2, Pg.170.

¹⁰ McDowell, Josh D. The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999. Pg.93, 111.

¹¹ Note 1, Pg. 1253.

^K See also Isaiah chapter 10.

¹² Note 4, Pg.197; Note 1, Pg.1131.

¹³ Note 1, Pg.112.

¹⁴ Barker, Kenneth L. and John R. Kohlenbeger III, eds. Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary, Volume I: Old Testament. Zondervan, 1994. Pg.1061.

¹⁵ Note 4, Pg.199-200.

¹⁶ Note 1, Pg.1059.

¹⁷ Vos, Howard F. Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999. Pg. 264.

¹⁸ Note 1, Pg.1157-1158.

¹⁹ Note 17, Pg. 290.

²⁰ Young, Rodger C. "Evidence for Inerrancy from an Unexpected Source: OT Chronology." *Bible and Spade*. 21.2 (2008). Pg.54. biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/08/15/Evidence-for-Inerrancy-from-an-Unexpected-Source-OT-Chronology.aspx

²¹ Note 20, Pg.55.

²² Payne, J. Barton. Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy. Baker Books, 1973.

²³ Note 4, Pg.195.

²⁴ Note 4, Pg.195.

²⁵ Note 1, Pg.835-837.

²⁶ Note 22.

²⁷ Note 2, Pg.176.

²⁸ Note 1, Pg.292.

²⁹ Archer, Gleason L. A Survey of Old Testament Introduction. Updated and Revised Edition. Moody Press, 1994. Pg.368-369.

³⁰ Note 29, Pg.388.