

Response to Dr. Wood

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Alexander Graham Bell's revolutionary invention of the telephone was, when first introduced, "all too often regarded as a joke and its creator-prophet as, at best, an eccentric" [2]. From our vantage point today, with one or more telephones in every home, we wonder how people could have been so narrow-minded. But when you have communicated with your next door neighbor by hollering over the back-yard fence for forty years – and your father did the same before you, and likewise your grandfather, and so on back into the dim, distant past – the simplicity of picking up a headset and dialing a few numbers to accomplish the same thing (and a whole lot more besides) can easily seem ridiculous, impossible, or even perverse.

While I do not pretend to possess the genius of an Alexander Graham Bell, I have, nonetheless, been privileged to discover something new and quite extraordinary in the field of biblical chronology. Several years ago, in the course of my normal research into biblical and secular chronologies at the Institute for Creation Research, I discovered that traditional biblical chronology accidentally leaves out a thousand years of real history just prior to the time of Eli and Samuel. This means that, contrary to conventional expectations, there is a large historical gap in the Bible between Judges and 1 Samuel, and incidents, such as the Exodus and the Conquest, and people, such as Moses and Abraham, in the portion of the Old Testament before the time of Eli, should be properly dated 1000 years earlier than has traditionally been believed.

It needs to be emphasized that this discovery does not represent just another fine tuning of yet another mundane chronology. It is, in fact, a

radical adjustment, and its impact is revolutionary. It revolutionizes our understanding of the history of Israel, it revolutionizes our understanding of pre-monarchical biblical archaeology, and, most importantly, it revolutionizes our ability to harmonize much of Old Testament history with secular history and archaeology – and it does so in a very positive way.

In the Autumn 1993 issue of *Bible and Spade* [7], ABR published Dr. Bryant Wood’s strongly worded and somewhat lengthy critique of the new chronology which results from my discovery. Wood concluded [7, page 111], “A critical review of the proposed chronology reveals that it is misguided, lacks credibility, and is without a rational basis. Aardsma’s 1,000 year gap idea cannot be taken seriously and should be immediately dismissed.”

The significance of a revolutionary idea is not always easy to grasp – witness the early response to Alexander Graham Bell’s telephone. I suggest that Dr. Wood has experienced some difficulty in this instance – that he has failed to quite grasp what I am proposing – and that his uniformly negative assessment of my work is due, not to any actual defect in my discovery, but simply to the fact that he and his predecessors have had to holler over the fence for such a long time.

1 Response to Personal Charges

Before I begin to show why I believe this to be the case, however, there is another matter which must first be dealt with. Dr. Wood has not only attacked my work (which is normal and fair enough) but also, in a number of instances, my character. Specifically, Dr. Wood’s article makes the following personal charges:

1. Aardsma manipulates Scripture to further his own cause (“we see an example of the distortion of biblical history by the author in order to produce a fit . . .” [7, page 100]).
2. Aardsma is careless in his biblical research (“Here again, the author has not read the biblical text carefully.” [7, page 103]).
3. Aardsma makes “rash, irresponsible and unjustified” [7, page 103] statements.

4. Aardsma attempts to deceive people by selective presentation of data (“The author’s approach is to select various bits and pieces of information which seem to support his hypothesis, while neglecting the large bulk of data which discredit it.” [7, page 111]).

It seems needful to clear my name to some degree before attempting to deal with Dr. Wood’s more academic concerns.

Let me begin by simply stating that I deny all four charges. It is most certainly *not* the case that I have set out to deceive anybody, or that I have written anything which I did not wholeheartedly believe to the best of my knowledge to be accurate, true, and right. My published statements regarding this discovery have been, to the best of my ability, carefully thought through, logically developed, and appropriately documented. Finally, I have made every effort to “rightly divide the Word of Truth”.

I feel I need to respond to the first charge in the above list in a little greater detail, however, because of its serious implications. It reads in full as follows: “In the case of the pharaohs of the oppression and Exodus, we see an example of the distortion of Biblical history by the author in order to produce a fit between the proposed chronology and secular history.” [7, page 100] This is a pretty serious charge, and I do not take it lightly. Scripture specifically warns us to be on guard against those who distort the Word of God in order to further their own program, calling them “savage wolves” (Acts 20:29,30). God helping me, I will never have any part of such behavior.

But this charge is certainly not warranted in the present case. To distort Scripture you must make it say something it does not really want to say and that it does not really mean, and I have done no such thing.

Wood makes this charge in regard to the following statements of mine:

The first biblical detail is that the pharaoh of the oppression seems to have had a very long reign. The length of his reign is not given explicitly in the Bible, but the biblical narrative leaves one with the impression that it was the same pharaoh whose daughter found Moses as a baby and adopted him (Exodus 2:10) that later wished to kill Moses (Exodus 2:15) and who did not die until Moses was approximately eighty years old (Exodus 4:19, 7:7). If this impression is correct then this pharaoh had to reign for a minimum of eighty years, a highly unusual length of time. [1, pages 64&65]

I go on to say that we should expect a short reign for the next pharaoh because a natural reading of the biblical account leads us to suppose that he was drowned in the Red Sea not long after he took up his office. Wood claims that I have forced my view of the number of pharaohs involved here and the length of their reigns on the Bible against its true desire and intent, to fabricate evidence for my new chronology where none actually exists.

I fail to see how Wood comes to this conclusion, however, for this view is indeed the one that a natural reading of this passage suggests. I am not making up anything new here – this is the way this passage has been understood by ordinary Christians for a very long time. Look, for example, at the following piece by Alexander Whyte, a preacher of the last century:

Come on, let us deal wisely with them, said the ill-read and ignorant sovereign who sat on the throne of Egypt at the time when the children of Israel were fast becoming more and mightier than their masters. Come on, was his insane edict, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply and it come to pass that, when there falleth out any war, they join themselves to our enemies and fight against us. Therefore, they did set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. But the more they afflicted them the more they multiplied and grew. Till in a policy of despair this demented king charged all his people, saying, Every son of the Hebrews that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive. This is all that remains on the statute-book of Egypt to testify to the statesmanship of that king of Egypt who had never heard of Joseph the son of Jacob, the servant of Potiphar, and the counsellor and deliverer of the kingdom. That was the statute-book, and that was the sword and the sceptre, that this Pharaoh handed down to his son who succeeded him, and who was that new Pharaoh whom God raised up to show in him His power, and that through him His name might be declared throughout all the earth. A Pharaoh, says Philo, whose soul from his cradle had been filled full of the arrogance of his ancestors. And indeed, he was no sooner sat down on his throne, we no sooner begin to hear his royal voice, than he at once exhibits all the ignorance and all the arrogance of his ancestors in the answer he gives to Moses and Aaron: Who

is the Lord that I should obey Him? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go. Get you to your burdens. It is because you are idle that you say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord. Go, therefore, for there shall no straw be given you, and yet you shall deliver your tale of bricks! The father had not known Joseph, and the son knew neither Joseph, nor Moses, nor Aaron, nor God. [6, page 150]

It is perfectly clear that Whyte, at least, with no ax to grind, read this passage the same way I do, and, evidently, so did Philo. I have not distorted anything. I have not even insisted that this passage *must* be understood in this way, I have only said that this is its most natural reading – and I yet insist that this is the case. It is only modern scholarship, led by their knowledge of the history of Egypt and their traditional views of biblical chronology, that wishes we would all forget that this is what this passage naturally seems to say. Why? Because their view of biblical chronology cannot tolerate such a natural reading. Wood, for example, would have to accommodate no less than five pharaohs over this period of time from the birth of Moses through the Exodus, if I understand his chronology correctly.

2 Who's Out of Their Field?

I must deal with one other preliminary matter before proceeding with the defense of my work. Wood implies that I am ignorant of the field to which I have addressed myself, and that he is the expert (“Apart from the author’s admitted lack of knowledge in the field of archaeology . . .” [7, page 111]). This is not correct. My book is about *chronology* not *archaeology* (these two fields are not identical, by any means) and chronology is very definitely my field of expertise.

I obtained a Ph.D. in nuclear physics in 1984, not so I could run a nuclear reactor, but so I could learn modern radioisotope dating methods – the premiere dating tools actually employed in the historical sciences today – from the inside out. I have a background in physics which enables me to understand the physics of radioisotope decay, but my Ph.D. program was not a traditional nuclear physics program. I crossed over into the geophysics program at the University of Toronto and took a number of graduate courses in the actual application of these radioisotopic methods. My Ph.D. thesis

was on the detection and measurement of Al-26 and Be-10. These are long-lived, rare, cosmogenic radioisotopes with application to geochronological problems. I am a scientist and my science is chronology.

I freely admit that I am not an archaeologist, but I have not suggested that I lack archaeological *knowledge*, as Wood claims. I have only stated that I lack technical archaeological training and expertise. But such technical archaeological expertise is not at all necessary for my chronological work, and was not required in the development of my new biblical chronology. It was necessary for me to use some results from the field of archaeology in the development of my new discovery, and even more so in its appraisal. But none of this required archaeological expertise – I did not need to perform any digs or correlate any pottery fragments, or anything of the sort. I only needed to read and understand what the professional archaeologists had already discovered and described.

I tried to emphasize this important point in my introduction, which is why I stated: “Fundamentally, however, this is not a book about biblical archaeology; it is a book about biblical and secular chronologies, and this should not be lost sight of by the reader” [1, page 5].

My book is not out of my field in the least. It is dead on center in my field of chronology.

Wood is an archaeologist. Wood is out of his field when it comes to chronology. I appreciate Wood’s background in archaeology and am pleased that he has taken the time to comment on my new chronology from his area of expertise. Unfortunately, a very significant number of his remarks are chronological in nature, not archaeological, and in this area he has left his field of expertise and entered mine. Consequently, his remarks carry a great deal less weight than may at first appear.

3 A Fatal Error in Logic

But I do not mean to base the defense of my work on any of these items. Wood’s conclusions regarding my work are principally invalidated by an elementary logic error which recurs repeatedly throughout his paper. Simply stated, when you have two competing scientific paradigms, A and B, any “proof” of the falsity of B which assumes as a premise the “truth” of A, is no proof at all. Yet this is what Wood does throughout. Since he al-

ready “knows” that hollering over the fence is the only true means of communication, it “follows” that the telephone is an impossible and ridiculous pipe-dream not worthy of a second thought.

This is why he concludes with the statement, “Aardsma’s 1,000 year gap idea cannot be taken seriously and should be immediately dismissed. Giving it even passing consideration distracts from *the correct understanding of Biblical history and chronology . . .*” [7, page 111, my emphasis]. Right; since A (his chronology and view of biblical history) is true (by assumption), therefore we know that B (my chronology) is false.

This, also, is why we find Wood making curious statements such as, “In addition, he uses unorthodox identifications, interpretations and chronologies to bolster his conclusions.” [7, page 111]. It is somewhat obvious, is it not, that I am not going to get very far with my thesis, which explicitly states that we must interject a full “unorthodox” millennium into traditional biblical chronology, if “unorthodox . . . chronologies” are somehow taboo from the outset, as Wood here implies?

Wood has missed the simple point that my “unorthodox” chronology says that his “orthodox” chronology is all wrong! He cannot assume the truth or inherent superiority of his “orthodox” chronology to disprove my “unorthodox” chronology. They are two competing paradigms. He cannot disprove one by assuming the validity of the other. To do so is to beg the question. And to beg the question is a logical fallacy.

This fallacy shows up everywhere in Wood’s paper. Let me give a few obvious examples. This one: “According to the proposed chronology, the Israelite war with the Philistines would have lasted about 1,000 years!” [7, page 25]. Does my chronology say there was continuous war between the Philistines from the time of Samson through the time of David? No! That’s what his paradigm says. My paradigm says we have an 800 year gap in biblical history at this time so that we do not know what they were all doing. They may have united forces for a while against another common enemy for all we know. Wood is assuming the truth of his paradigm to “disprove” my paradigm. Wood is begging the question.

Another one: “In other words, according to Aardsma’s reconstruction the Conquest would have occurred 150 or more years *before* the Exodus, a very awkward situation!” [7, page 108, emphasis in original]. Does my paradigm say the Conquest occurred 150 or more years before the Exodus. No! My paradigm says the Exodus happened ca. 2447 B.C. and the Conquest began

ca. 2407 B.C. (See table 4.1 of my book [1, page 38]). By my math that is 40 years after, not 150 years before.

How does Wood come to this curious conclusion? By begging the question. He assumes the validity of *his* dates for the end of EB III in Palestine, and the end of the Old Kingdom in Egypt, even though my paradigm explicitly rejects his dates, and then uses these to derive absurdities. Wood is, of course, free to question my dating of the end of the Old Kingdom, and he is free to question my dating of the end of EB III. What he is not free to do is to assume the truth of his dates and use them to “disprove” my chronology. That is begging the question.

Another one: “He then goes on to compare the size of Et Tell (25 acres) with Jericho (7 acres according to Aardsma, but in reality 12 acres)” [7, page 103]. Did I goof when I gave the size of Jericho as 7 acres? No. An exact estimate of the size of the various stages cannot be given because part of the tell has been cut away by a modern road, but the EB site is known to be smaller than the neolithic settlement which has been variously estimated by Kenyon at 8 to 10 acres, and I am not aware of any estimate for the size of EB Jericho greater than 8 acres. Where did Wood get 12 acres from? It seems he must be referring to the size of what the majority of archaeologists label the MB city of Jericho, which was somewhat larger than the EB city.

If I am correct in this then Wood is begging the question again. The MB city is only of interest to his paradigm, not mine. In my paradigm it is the final EB city which is of interest – I am comparing the size of the EB city at Jericho to the size of the EB city at the traditional Ai. It makes no sense in my paradigm to compare the size of MB Jericho to EB Ai. Why does Wood “correct” me in this way then? Apparently, because he “knows” that Joshua’s Jericho is at the MB level, not the EB level to which my paradigm assigns it. Thus, when I refer to Joshua’s Jericho and state that it was 7 acres, Wood corrects me and says it was 12 acres. He is begging the question.

Another one:

Aardsma wishes to relate Joseph’s famine to the transition from EB I to EB II in Palestine . . . The author is in error here . . . What he is describing is in fact the transition from EB II to EB III. In either case the date of Joseph’s famine according to the proposed chronology, 2879-2872 (p. 58), does not fit. The transition from EB I to EB II can be synchronized with the beginning of the first

Dynasty in Egypt, ca. 3000 . . . and the transition from EB II to EB III with the end of the 2nd Dynasty, ca. 2700 . . .” [7, pages 105&106]

First, did I goof in my specification of the transition? I admit I am no expert in the archaeology of Palestine in the Early Bronze, but I just reported what I heard from Ram Gophna of Tel Aviv University at a local lecture, and I think he knows what he is talking about. Am I reporting what I heard accurately? Apparently.

Ram Gophna began his fascinating lecture by noting the long continuity of occupation at settlements in the land of Canaan in the Early Bronze Age, a fact that has facilitated his study of settlement patterns in this period. He has found a dramatic demographic change between Early Bronze I sites, which were unfortified, and Early Bronze II sites which were fortified. During the transition between these periods, most of the small and middle-size sites were abandoned, while the large sites shrank dramatically in area and in estimated population. For example, Megiddo shrank from 160 acres to 13 acres, and declined in population from about 9,000 to about 900 or 1,000. The scale of the event is so great as to warrant the term “crisis,” but the cause remains a mystery. There is no evidence of an invasion by outside people. Instead, much of the population appears to have turned nomadic for unknown reasons. [5, page 22]

Now, I will leave it to Bryant Wood to take up the dispute over which transition we are talking about with Ram Gophna, since I am, regrettably, no archaeologist. Let me address Wood’s claims that the dates don’t work out, since I am a chronologist.

Does my new biblical date for this famine coincide with the date of the juncture of EB I and EB II or not? Yes. There is a normal uncertainty in the absolute date of this transition, but my date for the famine falls within the allowed time range. Why is Wood having a problem? Well, partly at least, because he is trying to use modern historical dates for the Old Kingdom of Egypt to determine the date of this transition, even though my paradigm explicitly rejects these dates. Wood is begging the question here again.

The section of Wood's critique most likely to impress his readers is his list of 29 sites which he claims "have no evidence of occupation in EB III" and are thereby supposed to be a problem for my chronology. It may be a little more difficult to see how these supposed counter-examples amount to little more than begging the question at this stage, but such is the case.

Before we look at how this comes about, however, a few other remarks seem in order here. First, let me point out that I did show how a similar, though smaller list, put together by Stiebing against Courville and others, begins to crumble when subjected to closer scrutiny [1, pages 77&78]. I have not bothered to look closely at Wood's list, but I did notice in glancing it over that Arad is included. Since I already answered the apparent Arad problem in my book [1, page 77], it appears that Wood's list would probably crumble at a faster rate even than Stiebing's if given any real attention.

Second, let me also point out that there is a certain irony in Wood's presenting my chronology with such a list, and declaring that "it is incumbent upon [Aardsma] to test the theory against **all** of the pertinent data, rather than just one or two data points" [7, page 111, emphasis in original]. Could Dr. Wood please explain how it is, if this is the way things are done in archaeology, that ABR continues, after decades of research and multiple thousands of dollars to labor over just two cities: Jericho and Ai? Must I, indeed, spell out how each of these cities which he has raised in objection to my new chronology should be explained by it before it can legitimately be put forward even as a viable idea, while his own chronology – which has been around a good deal longer than mine, and enjoyed the sympathetic efforts of a good many more archaeologists than mine – still exerts itself to explain just the first two cities of the Conquest? I do not wish to be unkind, but it appears to have escaped Dr. Wood's notice that my new chronology works at Jericho and Ai, at least, and that *without* the expenditure of hundreds of man-hours and thousands of dollars. Surely, this should count for something!

Third, there seems an element of hypocrisy involved in the presentation of such a list. Surely Dr. Wood is aware that a list of cities every bit as long as that which he has drafted against my chronology could be drafted against his. Indeed, I suspect that even I, who, as I have said, am no archaeologist, could outdo Dr. Wood in this list making exercise from a single Bible passage. Let me try.

In Deuteronomy 3:1-10 it is recorded that the Israelites, while still on the east side of the Jordan River and under the leadership of Moses, captured

60 cities from Og, king of Bashan. These must have been significant cities, for Moses describes them as strongly fortified, with very high walls (v. 5). Now I have not looked at each of these cities in this region in detail, by any means, but it is not necessary to do so for the present argument. I simply note that the most recent archaeological work in the Golan (Bashan) shows that many of the sites in this geographical region were *continuously occupied* right through Wood's Conquest date [3, page 533]. Meanwhile, the Bible unambiguously states that the population was wiped out completely at all of these cities: "All these were cities fortified with high walls, gates and bars, besides a great many unwallled towns. And we utterly destroyed them, as we did to Sihon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women and children of every city" (v. 5&6). We seem to have, in just this one Bible passage, 60 potential problem cities for Dr. Wood's chronology, do we not?

Let me add, before returning to the main argument, that these same 60 cities do not appear to be a problem for my new biblical chronology. Indeed, there *is a complete* hiatus of occupation in the Golan (you guessed it) at the date of the Conquest which my new chronology predicts. (An example of one of these cities which, according to my chronology, was conquered by Moses, can be seen in the article on the Leviah Enclosure in [4].) As a further point of interest, the archaeologists tell us [3, page 532] that after these cities were all wiped out, a tribally organized society of pastoral nomads – who meet our expectations of the biblical Israelites remarkably well – took over the land of Bashan.

But let us get back to how Dr. Wood's list begs the question. The principal point to grasp is that my new chronology automatically calls into question the "orthodox" identification of archaeological sites, and the "orthodox" interpretation of the biblical data bearing on many of the cities in Palestine. It does this because these sites have been assigned names, and the biblical text (which only mentions many of these sites in the briefest way) has been interpreted up to now, under the constraints and assumptions imposed by the old paradigm. Since I do not accept the constraints and assumptions of the old paradigm, I cannot logically accept the "orthodox" conclusions about the identification of sites and the meaning of the biblical text.

When Wood compiles such a list and claims it disproves my chronology, he is assuming the validity of his "orthodox" results to do so, and is begging the question. This is why I cautioned in my book,

Are we certain of the identification of each of the sites corresponding to the cities of the Conquest? (It is important to reopen this question at each site, as it is possible that some of the correct sites may have been rejected by the archaeologist simply because they were mistakenly thought to be outside the “biblical period”.)

(I would note here, in passing, that the fact that neither conservative nor liberal archaeologist had any idea they were excavating *biblical* material as they worked in the earlier time periods of interest to my chronology is a peculiar advantage for my discovery, not a disadvantage, as it gives their conclusions an unusual immunity to the influence of personal bias.)

Each of these sites does need to be examined carefully, as each does have some contribution to make to our understanding of this period. But this examination must be carried out from beginning to end in a way which is logically consistent with the new chronology. This will necessarily take a long time to accomplish; Wood’s hurried, beg-the-question approach is seriously inadequate, and its results prove nothing at this stage.

This problem invalidates Wood’s claims about Gibeon, for example. Wood says: “Since Gibeon is **smaller** than Et Tell, Et Tell **cannot** be the Ai of Joshua” [7, page 103, emphasis in original]. Is this true? Not at all. My paradigm does not accept the conventional “Gibeon”, at least not back to Joshua’s time. Not only is “Gibeon” (el-Jib) smaller than Et Tell, it also does not go back far enough to suit the biblical narrative in my paradigm. (El-Jib apparently only goes back to EB IV; my paradigm demands that Gibeon be in existence as a major site, larger than Ai, in EB III.) My paradigm says the biblical Gibeon of Joshua’s time has yet to be found. (If ABR’s Dr. Livingston can make such a claim for Ai, then surely it is fair enough for me to make a similar claim for Gibeon.) Wood is begging the question once again.

I could go on like this for quite a while yet, but I do not see any profit in it. There is not a single objection which Wood has raised which impacts my confidence in the validity of my new chronology in a negative way. I can find nothing of substance in any of his remarks.

4 Why So Long?

One final observation seems appropriate, however. In my opinion Wood's critique exhibits another rather obvious short-coming – it should not take *eighteen* printed pages to rebut my chronology if it is wrong. I venture to suggest that I could rebut any effort to interject 1000 years in biblical chronology anywhere back to Abraham in less than eighteen normal sentences. Let anyone try interjecting 1000 years between any two individuals normally thought to be contemporaries in the Bible and see how far they get. How would 1000 years between David and Solomon fare; or between Moses and Joshua; or Abraham and Isaac? Pick whomever you will, the results are immediately, obviously absurd – as one would expect them to be. You can't go interjecting a full thousand years into biblical history just as you please and expect to get away with it. Yet, curiously, when we do this between Samson and Eli we encounter no fatal biblical obstacle – both immediately and after long reflection (in fact, we immediately resolve some longstanding thorny issues in biblical chronology) – and the result harmonizes a great deal of archaeological data with biblical history where previously there was only chaos.

5 Conclusion

I will stick with my new discovery. The sum of everything I have seen regarding it says overwhelmingly that it is valid, and that the new biblical chronology which it yields is correct. This, of course, does not deny Dr. Wood and ABR their right, if they so desire, to continue to holler over the fence.

6 Epilogue

I regret that Wood's critique and this brief defence may be some readers' first introduction to my new chronology, for it is necessarily not the logical, carefully reasoned presentation of this revolutionary discovery I strove for in my book. These papers have focussed on many details, in an unfortunately

negative way, completely obscuring the overall pattern of harmony which the new chronology exhibits when viewed with a broader field of vision. The fact is, there is no other chronology of the past which harmonizes so much biblical and secular 2nd and 3rd millennium data in such a natural, simple fashion.

I can say without equivocation that my new chronology has worked out extremely well in every geographical region and every archaeological period to which it applies, clearly corroborating biblical history in panoramic view. Yes there is still a tremendous amount of detailed work to do, as I have pointed out all along, but there is no need to keep this discovery in a dark closet until every detail can be shown to fit and every objection answered. The positive evidence in its favor is already overwhelming; certainly it is sufficient to warrant some serious, objective consideration and field investigation.

ABR seems well positioned to conduct such investigations with their concentration of Christian, creationist archaeological expertise. I regret that they have assumed such a negative posture, and I urge them to reconsider. This new discovery instigates enough new research to keep everybody busy for decades. There is no lack of room, and their archaeological skills, employed in a constructive fashion, would be most welcome.

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