

ARTAXERXES' DECREE AND THE 483 YEARS TO THE BIRTH OF JESUS

THE IDENTITY OF THE BIBLICAL "ARTAXERXES"

If we use only Bible data and compare the Persian kings of Daniel 10:1 and 11:1-4 with Ezra 4:5-7; 24; 6:14-15; 7:1-13 and 29, the conclusion may be drawn that the 4th king of Dan.11:2 and the Artaxerxes of the Ezra passages are one and the same, i.e., the Xerxes of secular history. Furthermore, he is the same Artaxerxes found in Nehemiah who in his 20th yr. issued a decree to build the walls and city of Jerusalem. It is noted that Josephus makes the same conclusion and ascribes at least 28 yrs. to Xerxes where Ptolemy gives only 20 yrs. to his reign. Ptolemy's calculations on the Persian period are suspect, based on his own statements.

A 360 DAY YEAR ?

The author is familiar with the work and calculations of the great Sir Robert Anderson and many others who have followed along his lines. The net result of these works has reduced the 483 yrs. of the Dan.9 prophecy to only 476 by assigning them to have been 360 day years.

The great weakness in this reasoning is that the material in Daniel must be compared to that in the Revelation in order to so calculate. The people were given this prophesy in order that they know the time of Messiah, but Revelation would not have been at their disposal, it having been written A.D. 90-98. It is true that such calculation would be possible from data in Genesis 7 & 8. However, it is not certain that the people would have understood to do this. On the other hand, it is also noted in Esther 1:1-5 that the feast having lasted 180 days is 6 mos. or half a 360 day year. This could indicate a 360 day year – so that point is conceded possible by the author. If then the 360 day yr. is the correct year to use for the calculation and, using no profane data, and, if, for example, we use A.D. 9 when (at age 12 Jesus comes to Jerusalem and celebrates the Passover on 14th Nisan, which is his 13th birthday, Jesus' 12th year covers part of 8 & 9 A.D.) He comes the first time of his life to the Temple and presents Himself to the priests and elders beginning to "be about His Father's business" (Luke 2:40-52, this being a partial fulfillment of the double reference prophesy of Mal.3:1) as a starting point, we arrive at the year 467 B.C. as the 20th yr. of Artaxerxes [See B]. Hence his first year could be 486 B.C. Again, if this Artaxerxes is Xerxes I, this could agree with Ptolemy's date of 486 B.C. as Xerxes' first year and leaving Darius 36 yrs. of reign.

THE LENGTH OF THE REIGN OF DARIUS I (THE GREAT, HYSTASPIS)

Secular sources report that Darius was 28 when he took the throne. Ctesias of Cnidus (flourished 401-384 B.C.) a Greek, was physician to Artaxerxes Mnemon residing at court for 17 yrs. in Susa. He wrote a history of Assyria & Persia (Persica) based upon the Persian royal archives. Though he, like all ancient authorities, often exaggerates & is not always reliable, he gives Darius' lifespan as 73 yrs. This would give him 44 yrs. of sole reign.

Ptolemy's chronological dates are based upon **conjectures, guesses & on "certain vague floating traditions" made by Eratosthenes for the period Darius to Alexander**, along with Ptolemy's own astronomical calculations on eclipses. Eratosthenes (born 276 B.C.) wrote about 100 yrs. after Alexander

the Great. His method of conjecture rather than testimony led him to greatly exaggerate the antiquity of the events of Greek history.

Ptolemy, the heathen astronomer-astrologer then as a 2nd century A.D. worker, is a late compiler, not a contemporary historian or witness. His work is not corroborated. Not only does the lifespan of Darius as preserved by Ctesias go against him, but also the witness of his con-temporary Josephus, the national traditions of Persia, the national traditions of the Jews and by conflicting evidence of well authenticated events, as the flight of Themistocles to the court of Artaxerxes Longimanus. This flight is recorded by Thucydides (471-396 B.C.) writer of the "History of the Peloponnesian War", who was the most accurate and reliable of all the early writers. He dates the flight 471 B.C. and gives it the year of Artaxerxes Longimanus in which he comes to the throne. This differs from Ptolemy by nearly 7 yrs. and he is confirmed by the work of Charon of Lampsacus. We do not blame Ptolemy. We only mention his limited materials.

However, in the matter of the length of the reign of Darius, Ptolemy is supported by Herodotus (Bk.VII,3) who also gives him 36 yrs.

ECLIPSE CALCULATIONS

As to the eclipse calculations of Ptolemy and others, we mention that the famous eclipse of Thales recorded by Herodotus has been awarded five different dates ranging from B.C. 607 to 585 by different astronomers. The reader should be thereby warned of the danger and mistake of regarding such astronomically determined dates with the infallibility of a mathematical calculation.

These differences may be due to errors of observation by the historian, calculation error by the astronomer, and errors of identification on the chronologer's part, who may wrongly conclude that the dated eclipse calculated by the astronomer is the same one described by the historian. It could have been cloudy, etc. so that what was calculated to be seen was not seen.

Such calculations are often given as final authority but his mistake is basic. It assumes that the strength of a chain is the strongest link rather than its weakest link.

THE BIBLICAL ARTAXERXES CANNOT BE LONGIMANUS

Furthermore, a comparison of the Neh. 12:1-9 list of priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel in the 1st year of Cyrus as sole Rex of Persia (536 B.C.) with the Neh. 10:1-10 list of priests and Levites who sealed a covenant with Nehemiah in the 20th yr. of Artaxerxes (B.C. 445?) reveals that at least 16 and possibly 20 of those who returned with Zerubbabel as leaders (hence 30 yrs. old and older) were still alive in the 20th yr. of Artaxerxes.

If this Artaxerxes is Longimanus as is currently taught, then this generation of leaders is still alive 91 yrs. after (536-445=91) they returned to Jerusalem. The youngest would then be 91+30=121 yrs. old, others much older.

But the Scriptures reveal that life spans have been foreshortened such that only one man has lived past age 100 for over 700 yrs. (Jehoiada -2 Ch.24:15). That an entire generation suddenly lived so long is inconceivable. Therefore the Artaxerxes of Nehemiah is another king of Persia prior to Longimanus (i.e., Xerxes) thereby reducing these men's ages.

Again, Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes are not names but titles and Persian monarchs often claimed more than one for themselves. Cyrus called himself Artaxerxes. Furthermore, Xerxes of Thermopylae in one protracted sentence calls himself the son of Darius and then assumes the titles Darius and Xerxes the Arta.

Hence, the Scriptures mathematically demand that the traditional identification of the Artaxerxes of Nehemiah as being Longimanus is erroneous. Secular history confirms this telling us that Xerxes was the last Persian king to practice the religious tolerance depicted by the Biblical Artaxerxes (*Ancient Civilizations*, Hayes & Hanscom 1968, pg. 182).

THE 483 YEAR PROPHECY OF DANIEL CHAPTER 9

The author is persuaded that the Word of God is its own commentary and that it contains within itself all data necessary for its complete chronology.

Therefore, having begun at Adam (A.M.= 0) we have arrived at 3488 A.M. (516 B.C.) the 6th yr. of Darius I (Hystaspis) using only Bible data. If we then begin with the 15th yr. of Tiberius (Lk. 3:1) as c.27 A.D. when Jesus the Christ about age 30 (Lk.3:23) began His ministry being baptized and cleansing the Temple (John 2:13-22 cp. Mal. 3:1) in the 49th yr. of Herod's repair on the Temple as a point of fixed reference, we propose the following as the best and correct solution of filling the gap back to Darius.

First, measure back 30 yrs. from 27 A.D. to establish the birth of Jesus at 4 B.C. As the ministry of Jesus seems to have lasted c.3 1/2 yrs., the crucifixion would have transpired c. A.D. 30. There are only four occurrences in the life of Jesus of major significance from which to begin, namely, His birth B.C. 4, as mentioned previously, His 12th yr. at the Temple A.D. 9, His crucifixion or resurrection (which are only 3 days apart) in A.D. 30. Thus, if we start at each of these events and back up 483 yrs. [Dan.9:24-27...the decree which corresponds to the decree of the 20th yr. of Artaxerxes (Xerxes I) found in Neh. 1 & 2], we may compare the results with the aforementioned time span between these leaders who returned with Zerubbabel in B.C. 536 and the sealing of the covenant with Nehemiah in the 20th yr. of Artaxerxes. Measuring back 483 years from Jesus' baptism in c. 27 A.D. brings us to 456 B.C. as a possible date for the 20th yr. of Artaxerxes. However, 536-456= an 80 yr. gap to which at least 30 yrs. must be added bringing the minimum age of that entire generation of leaders to 110 yrs. As established previously, this is far too old and is thus ruled out.

If we use the year of the crucifixion and resurrection, A.D. 30, the men's ages are seen to be 3 yrs. older. Measuring from A.D. 9, we arrive at B.C. 474 with the result that the minimum age of that generation is 92. Lastly, measuring back 483 yrs. from the birth (4 B.C.) brings us to 486 B.C. as the 20th yr. of Artaxerxes (using solar yrs). 536-586 = a 50 yr. gap + 30 for an 80 yr. minimum age for that generation. This is the only solution which yields reasonable ages for these men when compared to the ages of their Biblical predecessors. Measure back 20 yrs. from 486 B.C. [See A] and we establish 505 B.C. as the 1st

yr. of Artaxerxes (Xerxes I). The remaining yrs. (506-516 B.C.) are left to Darius. This means that Darius, after the 16th yr. of his sole reign (probably in anticipation of some military undertaking) named Xerxes to reign in his absence. At this time (505 B.C.) Xerxes would become the Suzerain of the Jews and moreover that Persian with whom they dealt. It would be natural that they would reference their years with respect to his date of over lordship from his date of sole reign which began at the end of Darius' 36 yr. reign (486 B.C.). The plausibility of this may be seen in that Persian law ("which alters not") forbade a king to march with his army until he had named his successor (see Herodotus VII, 1).

CONCLUSION:

The point is that only Bible data is absolute and infallible, not profane; hence, the profane should be judged by the Scriptures and not the reverse as is the vogue today. Therefore, the people of Jesus' day should have known "the time of Messiah's visitation".

fnj