

PROBLEM PASSAGES — HORSES, CHARIOTS & MEN

2 Samuel 10:18 (KJB)	1 Chronicles 19:18 (KJB)
18 And the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew <i>the men of</i> seven hundred chariots of the Syrians, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote Shobach the captain of their host, who died there.	18 But the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew of the Syrians seven thousand <i>men</i> <i>which fought in</i> chariots, and forty thousand footmen, and killed Shophach the captain of the host.

Second Samuel 10:18 states: “David slew *the men of* 700 chariots” whereas 1 Chronicles 19:18 reads: “David slew of the Syrians 7,000 *men which fought in* chariots”.¹

Rather than siding with the liberals who continually question the faithfulness and preservation of the biblical text, the Bible believer should stand in faith and trust the word of Christ Jesus who testified that during the approximately 1,500 years from Moses to His First Advent every single jot and tittle had been preserved (Mat. 5:18).²

The so-called scribal error between these two verses is *not* a mistake; it is merely a paradox – an apparent error. There is no contradiction. Taking both verses as being the verbal, plenary, infallible words of the Living God, we simply conclude that, as there were 7,000 men fighting from 700 chariots, there were ten men in each chariot. Obviously, these armored Syrian “war wagons” were larger than the lighter hunting chariots we normally find depicted that were used by the king and his main support. Thus, in slaying the men of 700 chariots, David slew 7,000 Syrians. The “problem” does not really exist. It is, and always was, only a mirage.

Trafficking in unbelief, cynics as well as liberals & apostates also have “mental reservations” and “intellectual problems” with another perceived contradiction between the verses under consideration. Namely, were there 40,000 horsemen or 40,000 footmen – as though the passages are giving conflicting statements. However, “faith” recognizes that, to the contrary, these are complementary, independent accounts where that recorded in First Chronicles was written c.500 years after that found in Second Samuel. Thus, we understand that David and his army obviously also slew 40,000 horsemen, and First Chronicles later informs us that 40,000 Syrian footmen were slain as well. Again, the “difficulty” is not real; it is merely an illusion.

The Christian should simply believe the Word of God and not resort to unbelief or engage in language maneuvering (in either the Hebrew or Greek) in an unworthy attempt to circumvent the preserved Scripture before them.

¹ Note the italics in the above table indicating that the Hebrew in both passages literally says “David slew 700 chariots”. The KJB translators recognized this to be a metonymy and correctly inserted “*the men of*” (metonymy = a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated, as in the use of “Washington” for “the United States government”).

² The Hebrew alphabet contains “jots” (the letter “yod”, i.e., י which is about one-third normal height of the other Hebrew letters) and “tittles” (the minute “horns” or extensions that may barely be seen on the letters ך, ם, etc.).

2 Samuel 8:3-4 (KJB)	1 Chronicles 18:3-4 (KJB)
<p>3 David smote also Hadadezer, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to recover his border at the river Euphrates.</p> <p>4 And David took from him a thousand <i>chariots</i>, and seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen: and David houghed all the chariot <i>horses</i>, but reserved of them for an hundred chariots.</p>	<p>3 And David smote Hadarezer king of Zobah unto Hamath, as he went to stablish his dominion by the river Euphrates.</p> <p>4 And David took from him a thousand chariots, and seven thousand horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen: David also houghed all the chariot <i>horses</i>, but reserved of them an hundred chariots.</p>

The problem here is not chariots, but how many horsemen where there – 700 or 7,000?

1. A simple straightforward solution is that, being written c.500 years apart, the numbers involve two different kinds of horsemen. That is, Chronicles has recorded the total number of regular horsemen involved (7,000) whereas Samuel is giving us the number of captains among the horsemen (700; thus, one captain over ten).³ Accept this or not, it is far better than unbelief.

2. The Hebrew word for “horsemen” in both passages is *pārāsīm* (פָּרָשִׁים). Occurring 56 times in the Old Testament, it can be translated as either charioteers or cavalry.⁴ Therefore, as in the first example, the numbers 700 and 7,000 in these verses are seen to be entailing two different categories of horsemen. That is, the 7,000 were soldiers that rode in the 1,000 war chariots. These 7,000 had not been killed during the battle but were instead taken prisoner, whereas the 700 were cavalry. This explanation should be acknowledged by all Bible believers as a reasonable, simple God-honoring resolution.

3. Another possible solution focuses on the subtle wording difference in these verses. Chronicles says that Hadadrezer went to *establish* his dominion by the river Euphrates whereas the Samuel passage says Hadadrezer went to *recover* his territory (the Hebrew words are also different). In this scenario, the 700 were captured in a separate encounter that took place *after* 6,300 horsemen (7,000 minus the 700) had been taken. That is, Chronicles is saying Hadadrezer sent troops to stabilize his control over the Euphrates, and David captured 6,300 horsemen at that time. Having lost control of the river, 2nd Samuel relates that Hadadrezer sent another army to recover this territory at which time David took 700 more horsemen prisoner – 7,000 being the total number of Hadadrezer’s horsemen captured by the Israeli King from the two confrontations.⁵

³ Kulus, Dr. Chester, *Those So-Called Errors*, (Newington, CT: Emmanuel Baptist Theological Press, 2003), p. 239.

⁴ Although the Authorized King James Bible uniformly translates *pārāsīm* as “horsemen”, it could have equally been rendered “cavalry” anywhere the context would allow. Also note that in both 2 Sam. 8:4 and 1 Chron. 18:4 above, the word “horses” is italicized meaning it does not actually appear in the Hebrew text. Some could see this as being a so-called “scribal error” whereby David would be understood to have houghed all the “chariots”. Once again, the King James translators recognized this to be a metonymy and correctly inserted “horses” in italics.

⁵ Bouw, Dr. Gerardus D., *The Book of Bible Problems*, (Cleveland, OH: Association for Biblical Astronomy Pub., 1997) p. 84.

Another “horse and chariot” problem is perceived when 1 Kings 4:26 and 2 Chronicles 9:25 are compared.

1 Kings 4:26 (KJB)	2 Chronicles 9:25 (KJB)
And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen.	And Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen; whom he bestowed in the chariot cities...

The question is: how many chariots did Solomon’s 40,000 chariot horses pull?

We begin in faith and acknowledge that that both verses must be and are precisely accurate. The only question remaining is – how can this be so?

Obviously, the First Kings count is the total number of horse stalls, each housing one horse. Second Chronicles 9:25 groups the horses by tens – each of which is assigned to every chariot. That is, each of the horse/chariot stalls housed one chariot as well as ten horse stalls. Thus, 10 times the 4,000 horse/chariot stalls yields the 40,000 horses of 1 Kings 4:26.

Obviously, a chariot would not need ten horses to pull ten or so warriors. Thus, logic leads us to understand that in the event some were sick, became lame or were killed in battle, Solomon (the wisest man of the day, 1 Kings 3:11–12, 4:30–34; 2 Chronicles 9:1–7) had spare horses in reserve that were trained to operate as a team for each of his chariots. A wise king would not leave a chariot stranded just because one or more of its horses was either wounded or killed during the conflict.

Scripture also records that Solomon actually only had 1,400 chariots (1 Kings 10:26; 2 Chron. 1:14). One possible scenario would be that he later obtained 2,600 more bringing the total to 4,000. Another option is that he only had 1,400 chariots at the time, but in anticipation of obtaining many more, he already had an additional 2,600 stalls prepared.

Of course, another possibility is that here Scripture is speaking about two different locations at which Solomon had stables. After all, the 2 Chronicles 9:25 passage (chart above) as well as 1 Kings 10:26 tell us that Solomon had stalls for his chariots and horsemen in “cities” (plural).

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