

Unprecedented precision in biblical chronology

From Abraham to Paul: A biblical chronology

Andrew Steinmann

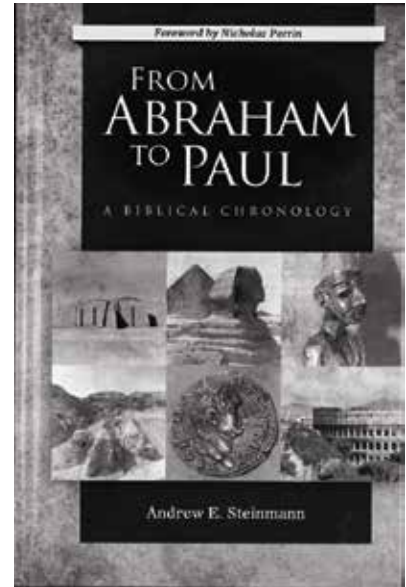
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Brian Thomas

The academic book *From Abraham to Paul* supplies a precise and biblically responsible timeline that spans the millennia from Abraham to Paul. Its high view of Scripture treats extrabiblical chronological indications as secondary to the Bible's chronological data.

Before this book joined my library, I wallowed in shaded uncertainty borne from decades of living with the mantra, “the earth is 6,000–10,000 years old”. I always wondered why, if God intended the year counts in Scripture to mean something close to what they appear from a straight reading (i.e. ‘years’), do we need a 4,000 year-long fudge factor?

It appears that most chronological uncertainties that give rise to that factor antedate Abraham, and this book only traces back as far as that great patriarch. Author Andrew Steinmann pinpoints Abram's birth to 2166 BC. He also identifies Paul's martyrdom as between late AD 67 and early 68. The 350-or-so pages in between hash through the necessary details behind deriving those, and a few hundred other, dates for biblical events. Leaving cumbersome minutiae to the thoroughly referenced technical papers, or to footnotes on each page, the author imports enough information into the main text to step the reader through each logical interpretive and historical possibility throughout most of Scripture's chronology.



Andrew Steinmann is an Old Testament and Hebrew expert working at Concordia University, Chicago, at one of the ten Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod Concordia Universities in the United States. He is a biblical (‘young earth’) creationist.¹ The writing style he employs in *From Abraham to Paul* is necessarily and appropriately dry. It uses common terms so that readers like me who are not Bible chronologists can understand all the arguments presented. It avoids both sketchy outlines and painstaking pedantry, instead marching steadily through a few thousand years in a thorough yet readable manner.

Resolving questions of timing

The crowning feature of this work, which stands upon the efforts of centuries of prior Bible chronology studies, has to be its almost unerring settlement of virtually every chronological dilemma with a solution that fits the Bible exactly. In other words,



Figure 1. Steinmann's year-by-year timeline from Abram's birth to Paul's Journeys fills a long hallway.

at every point of chronological contention, Steinmann whittles down the interpretive options, discards first those that depart from the Bible the most, and resolves an answer that keeps Scripture's numbers *perfectly* intact.

Take, for example, the chronological kink in 1 Samuel 13:1. Steinmann wrote:

“As for Saul's reign, as we have already seen, the text of 1 Sam 13:1 is corrupt, since the text as preserved credits Saul with an impossibly short reign of two years. However, Acts 13:21 and Josephus (Ant 6:378 [6.14.91]) indicate that Saul reigned 40 years” (p. 112).

He then adds a corroborating argument for those 40 years from Saul's youngest son, Eshbaal. Eshbaal was 40 years old when he began his rule. Verses like 1 Samuel 31:2 list Saul's three sons, and exclude Eshbaal. So this fourth

son must have been born after Saul became king, and must have come to the throne about 40 years after his father did. In this way, Steinmann resolves the chronology while illustrating how to reconstruct the original text by cross-checking with overlapping data when one textual tradition (i.e. the Masoretic) has an issue.

Chronology dabblers (like me) will want to know if Steinmann offers a 'late date' or an 'early date' for the Exodus. He wrote, “God's speaking to Israel from Mount Sinai took place no earlier than 4 Sivan [a Jewish month that overlaps parts of May and June on the Gregorian calendar] 1446 BC.” (p. 85). This 'early date' Exodus is the most bibliocentric option since it fits 1 Kings 6:1.

Plenty of conservative biblical archaeologists assert that the Exodus must be shifted forward a few hundred

years to mesh with archaeological concerns like Pharaonic reign lengths. Steinmann skips all these discussions, content to stick like glue to the task of constructing a purely biblical timeline. Will the 200 or so year difference between what secular archaeology demands and what the Bible lays out somehow, some day, find reconciliation through the discovery that 'archaeology' did not demand the time shrinkage, but rather faulty human interpretations of the archaeological evidence did?

Steinmann supplies two possible pharaohs for the exodus: Thutmose III from the Low Chronology of Egypt, or Amenhotep II (of which there may have been two) from the High Chronology. Biblically, Israel departed Egypt on 14 Nisan (March–April) 1446 (Numbers 33:3).

Just enough details

At times the book's arguments get tedious, especially for the trickiest issues that require many pages of explanation. But, whether brief or extended, the arguments are laid out as plainly and openly as the subject permits. The author has a thorough enough comprehension of Bible chronology, a realm that has often seen arguments spiral *ad infinitum*, to know where and when to expand and explain verses or cut to the chase. One way Steinmann does this is to simply refer the reader to technical journal articles that already hash through the tough stuff. He often skillfully summarizes those papers' contributions.

And speaking of cutting to the chase, readers can opt to leapfrog tedium and easily extract dates for each listed event by accessing the many summary tables found throughout the text. The very expensive book comes with an online key that accesses the author's entire timeline for the reader to download. I printed it some years ago and pinned it to a hall wall where I work at the Institute for Creation Research so that our scholars could use it as a handy reference, and so visitors could see the numerical precision found in Scripture (figure 1).

When I reached the midpoint of the book, I began to consider the possibility that Scripture might record the exact and total number of years from Adam to Jesus—not merely a 6,000–10,000 year ballpark. When I finished the book, I thought that more biblical creationists should be aware of it, so I wrote a chronology paper that essentially worked from Steinmann's placement of Abram's birth at 2166 BC backward to the Flood using both the Masoretic text's numbers and the higher numbers that both the Samaritan Pentateuch and pre-Christian Septuagint copies recorded.² In that paper, I tried to condense Steinmann's already summarized historical evidences—mostly inscriptions—that pinpoint

Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem to 587 BC. This anchors the Julian calendar onto the Bible's year counts going both backward and forward from that year. Then, by paying attention to Scripture's chronological details and clues, Steinmann and his community of chronologists were able to resolve finer historical details. For example, Judah's king Zedekiah was captured on the same day that Jerusalem's walls were breached after a long siege, on Saturday, 29 July 587 BC.

I now enjoy writing in the dates of various events into my personal study Bible. In that effort, I was quite pleased to discover the very handy appendices in *From Abraham to Paul* that list dates for specific verses. One appendix even lists years and, at some points, months and days for when certain prophets issued specific prophecies. An entrepreneur might do well in publishing a 'Historical Bible' with all of Steinmann's dates embedded on the appropriate pages, like early English Bibles used to show. Such a Bible would of course hold even more value with early Genesis events dated, but such must await scholars to sort through textual differences.

From Abraham to Paul earns high marks among conservative Bible chronologists for its novel assessment of New Testament events.³ Author Steinmann ties together clues from biblical and extrabiblical sources—at points having to correct extrabiblical sources like Josephus on the weight of other overlapping evidence—to assess age ranges for many events in Acts. For example, he wrote:

“Paul's first missionary journey must have ended with his return to Antioch sometime in AD 48. This is required by Luke's notice that Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch ‘no little time’ (Χρόνον οὐχ ὀλίγον; Acts 14:28) before going to Jerusalem where the Jerusalem Council was held in early AD 49 (see the discussion beginning on page 320)” (p. 330).

The future of chronology

Why did the author begin his chronological timeline with Abraham's life and not prior events? As I discovered in the process of trying to extend this timeline backward, text-critical scholars have not yet settled on the original numbers for Genesis 5 and 11. Most creation scientists accept the Masoretic text, some because those are the numbers in English translations, and others for textual reasons.⁴ Another view holds that the Genesis numbers in the earliest Septuagints, which match the Samaritan Pentateuch and pre-Christian Jewish writings but not Masoretic early Genesis numbers, preserve the original data.⁵

I heard that Steinmann is working on a Genesis commentary, and I know others are working on resolving textual differences. Hopefully, these kinds of labours will extend the Bible's timeline back from Abraham toward Adam. Overall, the data presented in *From Abraham to Paul* give renewed confidence in the historicity of the many chronologically marked Scriptural events, and thus more confidence in the accuracy of the totality of Scripture.

References

1. See also Hebrew professor: Genesis teaches six solar days! Jonathan Sarfati interviews Dr Andrew Steinmann of Concordia University, *Creation* 36(1):48–51, 2014; creation.com/steinmann.
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3. Young, R., Book Review: *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology: Part I*, Associates for Biblical Research, biblearchaeology.org, posted 9 July 2012.
4. Cosner, L. and Carter, R., Textual traditions and biblical chronology, *J. Creation* 29(2):99–105, 2015.
5. Sexton, J., Who was born when Enosh was 90? A semantic reevaluation of William Henry Green's chronological gaps, *Westminster Theological J.* 77:193–218, 2015.