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THE PLACE OF RADIOCARBON DATING IN A YOUNG EARTH FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

The biblical requirement for earth’s being under 7,500 years old presents a problem for conventional scholarship, as radiocarbon dating implies that life forms existed even earlier. Unjustifiably, some Christian scholars have overreacted by categorically vilifying all radiocarbon evidence. This extremist view fails to explain why radiocarbon evidence fits smoothly with dates obtained from “historical-archaeological evidence” (HAE) at times in ancient history (i.e., any time after 1400 BC) when biblical chronology provides knowable hard dates.

For example, biblical chronology requires that Sennacherib attacked Judah in 701 BC. In preparation, Hezekiah carved the Siloam Tunnel to divert water from the Gihon Spring to inside Jerusalem. Israeli geologists found and radiometrically dated plant-matter under waterproof plaster that lines the tunnel, which they dated to “700 BC or slightly earlier.” For another example, Khirbet Qeiyafa, Saul’s fortress associated with David’s battle with Goliath, was inhabited from about 1021–990 BC. The median date for radiometrically-dated olive pits connected with Qeiyafa’s destruction is 988 BC, another fitting match.

Yet recent Egyptological scholarship has proven that dates known from HAE that predate 1400 BC appear older when corresponding organic material is dated radiometrically, and that this offset increases exponentially when going back further in time. Radiocarbon dates for material from around 1500 BC are 100–120 years older, while material from the Early Bronze Age (ended about 2000 BC) is “ca. 150–300 yr older than conventional archaeological assessments.”

Although the leading Egyptologist in the study of this offset curiously suggested that fog is the culprit, this is inexplicable considering that even more recent scholarship has revealed the same offset in other parts of the eastern Mediterranean world, including the Jordan Rift Valley, where fog is not a viable option. The most likely cause is a change in the decay rate of 14C atoms as the earth was stabilizing after the global flood. Future data may allow an offset curve to be plotted. One new contribution is a datable inscription from Joshua’s destruction of Lachish in 1406 or 1405 BC, as organic material that was touching it dates radiometrically to 25–35 years too early.

KEYWORDS

radiocarbon, archaeology, chronology, history, dating offset

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Douglas Petrovich is adjunct Professor of Biblical History and Exegesis at Brookes Bible College (Missouri). He teaches remotely from Richmond (Texas). He previously taught and/or administrated at The Bible Seminary (Texas), Shepherd’s Theological Seminary (North Carolina), and Novosibirsk Biblical-Theological Seminary (Siberia). He completed a Ph.D. and M.A. in Syro-Palestinian archaeology from the University of Toronto, and a Th.M. (New Testament) and M.Div. from The Master’s Seminary. He became an ordained pastor in 1998, later serving as a church-planting pastor in Berdsk, Russia. He appeared in two documentary films: Patterns of Evidence: The Moses Controversy, and Is Genesis History?