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Recent Studies in the Chronology of the Period of the Kings

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time for a 'watered-down' or 'least-common-denominator' compromise to be attempted confessionally, pretending that there is a unity of confessions. Such a Church is only a house of sand. It is my opinion, after two years in the headquarters of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, that the success of the World Council of Churches lies in this, that it remain a council of 'churches' (plural), with each church body maintaining its full autonomy. Co-ordination and not elimination will assure life to this healthy ecumenical movement." Whether the cause of loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions will suffer a serious setback through the affiliation of the Lutheran World Federation with the World Council of Churches will undoubtedly soon become apparent. Our prayer is that whatever may be the fortunes of the new Federation, the message of *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide* will not be obscured in Lutheran teaching.

OFFICERS OF THE FEDERATION

Since Archbishop Eidem declined re-election, Professor Anders Nygren of Lund was chosen to be the head of the organization during the next five years. Dr. S. C. Michelfelder was chosen for the post of executive secretary.

St. Louis, Mo.



Recent Studies in the Chronology of the Period of the Kings

By WALTER R. ROEHRS

It is only natural that the period of the monarchy should hold a prominent place in Old Testament chronological studies. Nowhere in the Old Testament do we find such a mass of chronological data as in the Books of Kings and Chronicles. In fact, the history of the kings of Judah and Israel stands unique among ancient records. Nowhere else is such a complete and detailed system of computation employed; nowhere else do we find such an intricate and exact system of relating events chronologically to other events in the same country and to happenings in foreign lands.

Every Bible reader remembers how the year of accession of a given king in Judah is given in terms of the contemporary

king of Israel, e. g., II Kings 14:1: In the second year of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel reigned Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah. The converse is also true. The kings of Israel begin their reign in a year of a given king of Judah, e. g., 2 Kings 13:1: "In the three and twentieth year of Joash, the son of Ahaziah, king of Judah, Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, began to reign over Israel in Samaria and reigned seventeen years." The length of the reign is given, and in the case of the kings of Judah, the age of the monarch and the name of his mother is added. In addition, other events that transpired during the reign of a king are definitely placed as to time, e. g., 2 Kings 18:9: "And it came to pass in the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea, son of Elah, king of Israel, that Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, came up against Samaria and besieged it."

As this last passage already indicates, the cogs of this intricate machinery are furthermore meshed with the history of foreign nations. 2 Kings 18:13: "Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah did Sennacherib, king of Assyria, come up against all the fenced cities of Judah and took them." Jer. 25:1: "The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon." To make all these well-defined wheels turn in perfect harmony has been the task of many a Bible student. The job becomes difficult when certain data do not seem to gear with others. We do not have to delve into these figures very deeply to discover that mere additions and subtractions lead to many glaring discrepancies.

In the early and lush days of modern higher criticism the problem was solved by summarily rejecting the whole system of chronology as fanciful and therefore without any semblance of historical accuracy. J. Wellhausen in his *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* dismissed the whole system of reckoning as artificial and worthless. While this view is still reflected by such writers as W. Roberston Smith in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9th edition,¹ a much more cautious treatment and

¹ In the 14th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* an article by S. R. Driver and G. R. Driver still contains the following statement: "In some cases, perhaps, in the lengths of the reigns themselves, in other cases in the computations based upon them, errors which have vitiated more or less the entire chronology have crept in."

testing of the material has come into vogue. Pfeiffer in one of the most recent critical introductions to the Old Testament is not ready to throw all of it overboard, but says: "In spite of these discrepancies, inaccuracies, and errors, the chronology is not fantastic."²

In recent years numerous attempts have again been made to find a solution for the seeming discrepancies. Of such a nature is the work of J. Begrich, *Die Chronologie der Koenige von Israel und Juda*, Tuebingen, 1929. However, this article will be restricted to two of the most recent publications on this problem: *Biblical Chronology*, Part I, by Max Vogelstein, 1944, and an article appearing in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Volume III, July, 1944, pp. 137—185, by Edwin R. Thiele.

In evaluating these attempts it will serve our purpose to recall some of the problems. It has long been recognized that the regnal years of the two kingdoms, if added together at fixed periods, do not result in equal sums. The first point in the history of the divided kingdom which permits us to draw a line under the reigns of the kings for purposes of addition is the beginning of the reign of King Jehu of Israel. In establishing himself on the throne, he slew simultaneously the reigning king of Israel and of Judah. Therefore the length of the regnal years for both kingdoms from the death of Solomon to this point should tally. The following table presents the figures:

ISRAEL		JUDAH	
Jeroboam I	_____ 22 years	Rehoboam	_____ 17 years
Nadab	_____ 2 years	Abijam	_____ 3 years
Baasha	_____ 24 years	Asa	_____ 41 years
Elah	_____ 2 years	Jehoshaphat	_____ 25 years
Zimri	_____ 7 days	Jehoram	_____ 8 years
Omri	_____ 12 years	Ahaziah	_____ 1 year
Ahab	_____ 22 years		
Ahaziah	_____ 2 years		
Jehoram	_____ 12 years		
<hr/>		<hr/>	
Total	_____ 98 years, 7 days	Total	_____ 95 years

Since Jehu and Athaliah began to reign in the same year, we have again a common point of departure. If we add the regnal years of both kingdoms from this point to the fall of the Northern Kingdom, an even greater discrepancy appears. The fall of Samaria naturally ended the reign of the last king of

² Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 395.

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Israel. We are also told that this event took place in the sixth (2 Kings 18:10) year of Hezekiah of Judah. Therefore we can again arrange the regnal years of both kingdoms in parallel columns for purposes of addition. The result is as follows:

ISRAEL		JUDAH	
Jehu _____	28 years	Athaliah _____	7 years
Jehoahaz _____	17 years	Joash _____	40 years
Jehoash _____	16 years	Amaziah _____	29 years
Jeroboam II _____	41 years	Azariah _____	52 years
Zachariah _____	6 months	Jotham _____	16 years
Shallum _____	1 month	Ahaz _____	16 years
Menahem _____	10 years	Hezekiah _____	6 years
Pekahiah _____	2 years		
Pekah _____	20 years		
Hoshea _____	9 years		
Total _____		Total _____	
143 years, 7 months		166 years	

These figures also clash with the data supplied by extra-Biblical sources. This is true not only of individual dates and events, but also of the length of the whole era. The date for the beginning of the divided Kingdom is today quite generally set at 931.³ Likewise there is almost universal agreement that the Northern Kingdom came to an end in the year of 722. According to these dates the Northern Kingdom existed for 209 years, $931 - 722 = 209$.⁴ The totals for the regnal years of Israel and Judah to this point do not at all agree with these computations. The years of the reigns of the kings of Israel are as follows: 98 (from Jeroboam I to Jehoram) + 143 (from Jehu to Hoshea) = 241 years, an excess of 32 years. In Judah the discrepancy is even greater: 95 (from Rehoboam

³ An absolute date for the history of Israel is established with the help of the so-called Assyrian eponym lists. Here we find set in order the names of the kings and the individual years of their reign. Every year from 890 to 648 B. C. is accounted for. The starting point for an absolute date is gained with the help of astronomy. An eclipse of the sun mentioned in these lists is determined as having taken place on June 15, 763. Counting backwards and forwards from this year, each of these Assyrian kings' lists could be tagged with an actual number. As we have seen, the history of the divided kingdom not only has contacts with that of the Assyrians, but the Biblical account also fixes these contacts very precisely in terms of the Hebrew king and in terms of the king of Assyria. Again, once a starting point for the computation of the history of Israel has been gained, it is relatively simple to count backwards and forwards.

⁴ 931 as the end of Solomon's reign and the beginning of the dual monarchy is accepted by Thiele, *op. cit.* *The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible*, G. E. Wright, 1945, begins this period in the year 926; Begrich, *op. cit.*, in the year 933.

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to Ahaziah) + 166 (from Athaliah to the sixth year of Hezekiah) = 261 years, an excess of 52 years.

The same conflicting results appear for the history of Judah from the fall of Samaria to the fall of Jerusalem, although here the divergence is not so great. The fall of Jerusalem is fixed for the year 586. The total for this period, then, is 722—586 = 136. The kings of Judah and their regnal years are given as follows:

Hezekiah ⁵ —	23 years	Jehoiakim —	11 years
Manasseh —	55 years	Jehoiachin —	3 months
Amon —	2 years	Zedekiah —	11 years
Josiah —	31 years		
Jehoahaz —	3 months	Total —	133 years, 6 months

A third difficulty appears in the synchronisms in the individual reigns of the two royal houses. Here again the bare figures are at variance with one another. An example is the following: Jotham (Judah) reigned 16 years (2 Kings 15:33). However, Hoshea is said to have begun his reign in the 20th year of Jotham (2 Kings 15:30).

It is quite evident, then, that we must do more than add and subtract figures if we are to get a correct picture and a consistent chronology of this era of Old Testament history. What to do with these stubborn data and how to harmonize them is as old as Bible study itself.⁶ The books and articles dealing with this question comprise a small library. And the end is not yet. Any new attempt therefore to solve this vexing problem is of more than academic interest.

The article by E. R. Thiele comes to grips with the problems and succeeds in solving almost all of them. He does so by answering the crucial question: What method of calculating is the basis for these figures? He assumes various methods at various times and uses them as a working hypothesis.

He begins by positing a different calendar in Judah from that of Israel. In the Northern Kingdom it is the month of Nisan (spring) which marks the beginning of a regnal year; in the Southern Kingdom it is the month of Tishri (fall).

⁵ Hezekiah reigned a total of 29 years. Six of these years had elapsed when Samaria fell (2 Kings 18:10).

⁶ Jerome already was wrestling with this problem. In a letter to the priest Vitalis he says that the confusion in the chronology of the kings is so hopelessly bewildering "that to dwell on such matters is rather for a man of leisure than for a studious person." Quoted by Thiele from *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, Vol. XXII, col. 676.

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Likewise it is assumed that a difference existed in the kingdoms in the manner in which the beginning of a king's reign was computed. In Judah the accession-year system prevailed. Also called "post-dating," this system does not count the year in which a king came to the throne as his first year, but as his accession year. E. g., if a king would have acceded to the throne on August 1 of this year, the year 1947 would not be reckoned as the first year of his reign, but would merely be called his accession year and would be counted as part of the predecessor's reign.

Thiele finds reasons to believe that this system was in vogue in Judah throughout the whole period except during the reign of the following rulers: Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah, Joash. During the time of these kings the beginning of the reign was computed according to the method used in Israel. At Amaziah's time, however, the accession-year system was re-introduced. These changes in the system of computation are made plausible by deductions drawn from the Biblical account.

When the northern tribes seceded, the beginning of the king's reign was computed according to the non-accession, or "ante-dating," system. The king who began to reign on Aug. 1, 1947, would count the year 1947 as the first year. Thiele assumes that this system prevailed in Israel unto the time of Jehoash; from Jehoash to Hoshea, the last king, the accession-year system was used.

No interregna are posited. Since the totals as given above are already too large, the assumption of interregna would only aggravate the difficulty. On the other hand, a number of co-regencies are assumed. Some of these are clearly indicated in the Biblical account.⁷ Others are assumed merely as a working hypothesis. The following kings are credited with a co-regency with their predecessor: Omri, 885/84 to 880, Jeroboam II, 793/92 to 782/81, Pekah, 752 to 740/39 (Israel); Jehoshaphat, 873/72 to 870/69, Jehoram, 853 to 849, Azariah, 791/90 to 767, Jotham, 750 to 740/39, Manasseh, 696/95 to 687/86 (Judah).

Whenever the date of the king of Judah is given, it is

⁷ 2 Kings 8:16: "And in the fifth year of Joram, the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being then king of Judah, Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, began to reign."

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reckoned according to the system in vogue in Judah at that particular time. Conversely, the reign of an Israelite king is computed according to the prevailing Israelite custom.

When these principles are applied to the bare numbers as recorded in the Masoretic text for the kings of Israel and Judah, a remarkable agreement results. No change or emendation of the text is necessary. The synchronisms of the kings of Israel with those of Judah (and vice versa) are in perfect accord. When, e. g., Azariah is said to have begun his reign in the 27th year of Jeroboam of Israel, a tabulation of the years reveals that it is exactly in the 27th year and not in the 26th or 28th year.

This means also that the sum of the regnal years of the kings of Israel agrees with the total of the years of the kings of Judah. Thus, e. g., the total number of years resulting for the kings of Israel and Judah, as given in the first tabulation, is not 98 or 95 years, but exactly 90 years for both kingdoms, 931—841.

Another factor that commends this method of procedure is the fact that the results tally beautifully with the dates known in the Assyrian and Babylonian chronology. According to Assyrian records, Shalmaneser fought against a coalition of kings at Qarqar in the year of 853.⁸ As one of his opponents Shalmaneser mentions Ahab. The chronology of Israel based on the above principles makes 853 the last year of Ahab's reign and thus makes it possible for him to participate in this battle. This same Assyrian king also claims to have received tribute from the Israelite king, Jehu, in the year of 841.⁹ This year, according to the procedure outlined above, marks the accession year of Jehu and thus fits into the picture of the time. The year 722 is established by extra-Biblical sources as the year in which Samaria and the Northern Kingdom fell into the hands of the Assyrians. This was the year of the death of Shalmaneser V and the accession of Sargon II. The date stands as correct when computed on the basis of the principles as adopted by Thiele.

Ingenious and complicated as this system of computation may seem, it is attractive by the simple proof that it works.

⁸ David Daniel Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, Vol. I, secs. 563, 610, 646.

⁹ *Ibidem*, sec. 672.

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It shows that the mass of chronological data given for this period of the history of Israel is correct. It inspires new confidence in the exact transmission of the Old Testament text. It shows that so many difficult problems are problems only because of our lack of understanding of the basic factors involved. Once you have discovered the basis for these figures, the chronological parts fall into place like so many pieces of a jig-saw puzzle.

It would not be honest, however, to end this discussion at this point and to leave the reader under the impression that all problems have been solved in the system of computation suggested by Thiele. The dates given for the reign of Hezekiah and his two predecessors do not fit into the scheme of things. Thiele cannot solve the situation without resorting to the expedient of scribal errors in a number of passages. While we admit the possibility of such errors in the transmission of the text, does not the astounding reliability of so many other figures for this period suggest that we exercise a little more patience before adopting such drastic measures? Is it not possible that more study will provide a key also to these seeming discrepancies?

Space does not permit a full discussion of these problems. It is interesting to note, however, that all the difficulties that remain for Thiele are within the compass of two chapters of the books of Kings. Three of them are within ten verses of one of these chapters (2 Kings 18:1, 9, 10). Again, does not the concentration of these seeming discrepancies suggest that somehow a different and yet perfectly normal method of computation has been used for this group of data?

It is at this point that the second publication comes into the picture: *Biblical Chronology, Part I*, by Max Vogelstein.

As just stated, one of the main issues in the unsolved problems deals with the period of Hezekiah in its synchronism with the history of the Northern Kingdom and the records of Assyria. According to 1 Kings 18:1, Hezekiah came to the throne in the third year of Hoshea. Samaria fell in the *sixth year of Hezekiah* and the ninth year of Hoshea (1 Kings 18:10). According to common consent this was the year 722. In verse 13 of this same chapter we are told that it was in the *14th year of Hezekiah* that Sennacherib's campaign against Jerusalem took place. This campaign has been fixed for the

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year 701. If 722 was Hezekiah's ninth year, 701 can hardly be his 14th year. This is merely one of many problems which dot this period. Even the ages given for the kings do not fit into the picture.

Perhaps Vogelstein is on the way toward a solution of the problem. He insists that both figures are correct and finds the solution in a double system of computation. "We suggest that during the reign of Hezekiah a *new era* was launched with its epoch in 714/13. The proper occasion would have been the rededication of the Temple and the great cult reform, which might well have been considered the beginning of a new age."¹⁰

Hence, when we read that Samaria fell in Hezekiah's sixth year (722), this item is based on the system in vogue at that time. When, however, we are told that Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem in Hezekiah's fourteenth year (701), the year 714/13 is used as the starting point.

While this suggestion solves one of the difficulties of this era, it is by no means the key to the whole problem. The reign of Hezekiah and his predecessors (740—716) still bristles with incongruities: their own succession, their relationship to the Israelite kings, and their contacts with the Assyrian kings. What makes the situation all the more difficult is the fact that any shift in the chronology "destroys the entire synchronism of Judaeon and Israelite history, for in these annals everything is so closely dovetailed together that, if we remove a single stone, the entire structure tumbles to pieces."¹¹ However, the perfect harmony that has resulted, once the correct basis or system has been found, should hold out the hope for a solution of the problem without resorting to the assumption of wholesale scribal errors.

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¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹¹ Thiele, *op. cit.*, p. 163, quotes *The Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament*, Eberhard Schrader, I, 217.